ESSAYS ON LITERATURE AND LIFE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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ESSAYS ON LITERATURE & LIFE

BY

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PREFACE

FROM time to time my husband chose from the longer articles which he had written for the *Times Literary Supplement* those which he hoped had more than a temporary value. These were published under the titles, *Essays on Art*, *Essays on Books*, and *More Essays on Books*, but the last of these contained no work written after April 1921.

Many of his friends think that during the time from this date until his last illness he wrote some of his best and most mature work. The two volumes published since his death consisted, the former entirely, the latter mainly, of matter not previously printed. I have ventured to choose and to reprint here some of his latest and most characteristic contributions to the *Times Literary Supplement*, and to the *London Mercury*. To the editors of these papers I am indebted for permission to reprint these articles. I also include in this book, with Mr. Roger Fry's

kind permission, a poem, " Simpson's Choice," which was published at the Omega Workshops, but is now unobtainable. I should also like here to thank, for his kind assistance in reading the proofs of this book, Mr. Bruce Richmond, to whom my husband was so much indebted from the beginning, as now at the end, of his literary work.

Most of the articles in this book are critical, but my husband expressed himself at least as fully in criticism as in any other kind of writing.

EVELYN CLUTTON-BROCK

October 1926

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ESSAYS ON LITERATURE AND LIFE

I

Pure Literature

IN the greatest plays there are moments when the play ceases and something else happens; they arise out of the action of the play, but when they come, it is forgotten:

> Thou remember'st
> Since once I sat upon a promontory
> And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back,
> Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
> That the rude sea grew civil at her song.

The actor, saying that, should cease to be an actor, should cease to be Oberon even; he, Oberon, and the play, should lose themselves in that music as the singer and Cherubino and the opera are lost when "Voi che sapete" begins. Mozart and Shakespeare are subject to fits of a divine absence of mind in which they are called into another state of being and carry us with them. They too are listening to a music which supersedes even their delightful business; with a wave of the hand

they stop it so that the whole world may listen too.

Any pretext, any turn of events, may bring these moments; they happen even at the height of tragedy when we are absorbed in the issue. Lear and Cordelia enter prisoners and then Lear ceases to be Lear and the play to be a play:

> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too—
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
> And take upon's the mystery of things,
> As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out,
> In a wall'd prison, packs and sets of great ones
> That ebb and flow by the moon.

There is eternity in the sound of the words as well as in the sense; circumstance falls away like scenery and a universal voice is heard speaking the language of the absolute. This may happen in prose as well as in verse, it happens in the Sermons of Donne; and it is the consummation of all art. Shakespeare would not be one of the greatest poets, nor Mozart one of the greatest musicians, if it did not happen to them; but it cannot be willed or contrived. The poets who write plays as pretexts for such moments seem too poetical

and not dramatic; that passage we have quoted from *King Lear* rises naturally out of the plot ; when it begins it is what Lear would say, expressing exactly his return to sanity and joy and the beautiful conversion by adversity of a stubborn mind ; but, never losing its propriety, it becomes the speech of more than Lear and to more than Cordelia. And this largeness and universal application are in the sound no less than the sense ; it is a tune which, when we hear it, we recognize as made by the spirit of man.

Every good thing is known and defined by its best, and it is from moments such as those, which happen in all the arts, that we may know what art is and why it is valued. All excellence is rare and hard, and the greatest artists seldom achieve that which, finally, art exists to achieve. Poets are always writing, painters painting, musicians composing, in the hope that this, which they cannot will, may happen to them. They spend a vast deal of energy on their work, much of which seems wasted in sentiment or pedantry or the solution of some technical problem ; but men choose art for the business of their lives, and labour at it alone and without pudding or praise, for the sake of these moments which have happened to other artists and may happen to them. And the world with all its indifference to art yet does value these moments and preserves with a religious awe the works in which they occur. The value

is half unconscious, the awe seldom expressed ; but all human beings think better of humanity because Shakespeare and Beethoven and Michelangelo were men and had the power of saying more than mortal things.

In fact, art sets us a standard, not only of making or doing things, but of being. For these great moments express, and actually bring about in us, a state of being different from our ordinary life, so different that we may call it transcendent. While we are in it, we know that our ordinary life has purpose or value only in so far as it prepares for and leads up to these rare moments of transcendent being. But most of us quickly forget this knowledge in the routine of life, we lose our standard, grow content with ourselves and even with each other, and talk as if the routine, the preparation, were all, as if plumbers and politicians were not subsidiary but final. We find something unpractical or effeminate in the passion for the absolute, and talk with a sneer of art for art's sake. But the passion for the absolute does not mean art for art's sake nor does it mean the worship of the artists ; the greatest art is always about something not itself, and the greatest artist does not desire to be worshipped but worships. Nor is he a peculiar person with a trick of his own; rather, unlike all those engaged in subsidiary activities, he is representative of all men, a priest without sacerdotal tricks, because of his passion for the absolute.

It may go with many defects; and we cannot understand why disreputable persons like Villon and Verlaine and Poe, persons who could do hardly anything decently except what they did transcendently, should possess, however rarely, the power of speaking so that the speech of good men of talent sounds like the creaking of cart-wheels compared with theirs:

> Helen, thy beauty is to me
> Like those Nicean barks of yore,
> That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
> The weary, wayworn wanderer bore
> To his own native shore.

Poe is said to have written that in boyhood, when he can have experienced little and learned little; but many wise and good men have written all their lives without ever achieving anything equal to the first two lines. They are like music rising at the wave of a great conductor's wand; you must listen to them; and, though the poem speak of nothing in which you are interested, though you do not know what those Nicean barks may be, or whether Helen be Helen of Troy or a friend of Poe's, though at the end of it you cannot answer, nor do you wish to answer, any of these questions, that matters nothing. For the poem is not about any Helen in particular; it is an expression of the passion for the absolute which itself arouses that passion by its music; and its beauty is like those Nicean barks of yore, and carries us gently o'er a

perfumed sea to our own native shore, which we had forgotten in the routine of our exile.

> Lo, in yon brilliant window-niche,
> How statue-like I see thee stand,
> The agate lamp within thy hand,
> Ah! Psyche, from the regions which
> Are Holy Land.

Anyone here can point out words and phrases which would be commonplace, or even common, anywhere else. If we said, "Ah Psyche from the regions which are Holy Land," it would be absurd; we could not make the context for that cadence. But in Poe's poem the context is made, and the cadence expresses finally and directly the desire for an absolute which is not an abstraction, and which manifests itself to those who desire it passionately, in a face, an attitude, a symbol, some moment of experience which to the poet speaks as clearly as his poem speaks to us. "Therefore thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee; because thou hast loved much." That is true of Poe and other wastrels who seem unjustly gifted; their gift is the love of the absolute, and, when they express it, we know from the very curve and harmony and momentum of their words that this passion has been sleeping in us too, and we are grateful to have it awakened, if only for a moment.

Why do so many able and learned and rational writers fail finally to satisfy us? Why

are we impatient of Macaulay, for instance, after reading much of him, and especially when he speaks of literature or the mind and the passions of man? Because he seems to lack the sense of the absolute and the passion for it, to be content with a provisional and conditional universe, in which you may be comfortable if you exercise your commonsense and in which politics are as final as anything can be. So in all his writings there are no magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas; they imprison us in a well-furnished but never beautiful room with no views through the shut windows. They are consistent, reasonable, well informed, but they imply that he gives us all there is to give; and we rebel. We protest that it is not all, and that any writer, no matter what his theme or his limitations, ought to be aware, and to make us aware, of something else. Indeed all art without the passion for the absolute, just because it is art and all the more if it is well done, irks and dispirits us. It is like a joke without a point; for the point of art is the passion for the absolute, the problem of art is to express it in concrete, not in abstract, terms; and if a man lacks this passion, or has lost his faith in it, he should occupy himself with something else.

So the criticism of art, and in particular of literature, should always finally be concerned with this passion and should judge all works of art, both matter and manner, by their concern

with it. The critic may talk of many subsidiary things, but he must know that they are subsidiary and must see them always in relation to the main task of art. Macaulay's criticism, for all its knowledge and energy, disappoints us because the knowledge is of subsidiary things and the energy is absorbed in them. When he seems to be talking of literature he is talking of something else; and he has no real standard. Like so many critics of Shakespeare, he does not know why Shakespeare is greater than Anthony Trollope. He may pay compliments to the great and find reasons for admiring them, but they are irrelevant reasons. People call Shakespeare a master of the human heart; but he is a master of it, if at all, because he sees it in relation to an unimaginable beauty and perfection, because for him the desire for that beauty and perfection is the most human of all desires; and his profoundest knowledge, together with his most inexplicable beauty of words, comes when he makes one of his characters utter that desire. *Hamlet* owes its beauty, its superior truth, and profundity to the fact that Hamlet himself, while tied even by his sense of duty to the narrow and ugly business of revenge, is still haunted by the passion for the absolute. He longs to escape into a world where crimes are not committed for so dull a thing as ambition, and where men are not dragged away from their dreams by the irrational duty of revenge. "O God,"

he says, in one of those sentences which escape from their immediate application into the universal, "O God, I could be bounded in a nut-shell and count myself a king of infinite space were it not that I have had dreams." The opposition between him and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, felt not only in what they say but in their very manner of saying it, is the opposition between those who have the passion for the absolute and those who have not, between the artist and the man of the world. To Guildenstern Hamlet says, in another passage which escapes from its immediate application: "Why look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me you cannot play upon me."

The heart of no mystery is to be plucked out by narrow arts and no music can be made by them; where men try to make use of each other, they do not understand each other. Because Hamlet lived in a world where men were all trying to make use of each other for some little purpose, and where he felt himself subdued to what he worked in,

Denmark was to him a prison ; the world, he says, is a goodly prison in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons, Denmark being one of the worst. It is because the play, beyond all its excitements and intricacies and climaxes, expresses the energy of Hamlet's desire for another world, that it is inexhaustible both in interest and beauty, always rising out of the story into music, and full of strange, universal voices like the Island of *The Tempest.*

And *Paradise Lost,* hampered by a primitive story which the obstinate mind of the poet refused to find obsolete, triumphs even over that story and a very perverse conception of the nature of God and of man, because it also is filled with the passion for the absolute, and with those thoughts that wander through eternity. This passion, intermittent in the matter and often thwarted by Milton's own private grudges and prejudices, sounds always in the words and their momentum and texture. That, no doubt, is what Matthew Arnold really meant by the grand style, though it is a bad name for a thing which is passionate always and grand only when grandeur is needed. A better name is the pure style, for purity is the essence both of the passion and of its true expression in any medium. It is like pure sound, thrilling, far reaching, and utterly persuasive, like a voice or many voices which have found themselves and their meaning in a tune, and which belong " unto

the everlasting life of song." The pure style is the expression of pure desire, and is known by the purity of that which it expresses. It also is what distinguishes pure literature or art from mixed and adulterated; and it has that magic which is so called because no man can will or contrive it and because, compared with it, nothing else in art or literature is worth having.

When we are subdued by it we confess also that nothing else in life is worth having, that its theme is the theme of religion itself and its desire the desire of religion. And we cannot but wonder then that mankind are commonly so absent-minded about their true desire and so irrelevantly occupied with other things. It is true that we must have good drains and government and meat and drink before we can turn to our passion for the absolute; the greatest artist could not express that passion or even feel it while hungry or sick or in fear of his life, or conscious of necessary duties undone. But the precedent conditions are only conditions, and we are always forgetting that; we seem even to be in a conspiracy to forget it; and how seldom does any one rebel in any brave and signal manner against that conspiracy of dullness and irrelevance. How seldom does anyone rise in the House of Commons and, instead of speaking to the question, suddenly cry:

> Helen, thy beauty is to me
> Like those Nicean barks of yore—

to remind the other members of what they spend their lives in forgetting.

Yet the more it is forgot, the more it haunts and tantalizes us. We are always being told now of the mischief done by repression of sex, as if that were all that we repressed or all the final content of our minds. Men fear more deeply, and are more apt to repress, the dangerous passion for the absolute; or they try to express it in some harmless compromise. Hence all the bad art and literature, the tawdry phrases of politicians, the tawdry plays and novels and pictures and songs. They come from repression of the passion for the absolute and at the same time are a distant homage to it; and the psychologist who ignores them is merely blind to a huge and bewildering mass of fact because he wishes to simplify his problem. He goes to a bad sentimental play and he says—Sex—because there are men and women in it who profess a grand passion for each other; but the very desire for a grand passion, if only for an absurd male or female, is itself the suppressed and thwarted passion for the absolute. Bad artists and sentimental audiences are afraid of it, and where it might lead them; they hope to enjoy its great moments without paying the price for them, they try to conjure up those moments with slow music and a break in the actor's oily, plausible voice; but they, too, are ignorantly worshipping an unknown God who is not

Priapus, and all their sham art could not be if it were not for the great moments of true art.

We need to be aware of its purity and jealously to distinguish between the pure and the impure, not so that we may enjoy the thought of our own good taste, but because only so can we have a standard of comparison, to be applied not only in art but in life itself. It is the touchstone of reality by which we may know all things true from all things false, and the world of reason from the nonsense world. Subsidiary things, because often they are necessary, are always presenting themselves to us as final, and all round us is a nonsense world in which they are taken for final. There is a huge, futile activity concerned with luxury instead of beauty, comfort instead of delight, and finish with no aim beyond itself except to show that much trouble has been spent upon it. All the products of this vain activity may delude us unless we have our standard and know why we have it. In Bond Street we should whisper to ourselves "Voi che sapete," or, if we have no ear for a tune :

> He will watch from dawn to gloom
> The lake-reflected sun illume
> The yellow bees i' the ivy-bloom.

Then the nonsense world may amuse, but it will not delude us ; and then, too, we shall be aware of the omnipotence of the passion for

the absolute when it possesses a great artist. For words in a dictionary are thin, harsh things—with no meaning, even, but what we choose to give them; yet in those lines they have far more than meaning, they are what they say. The whole complexity of a beautiful reality with all the dew upon it, and as it was experienced by Shelley himself, becomes ours, because that reality aroused his passion for the absolute, and because he lived for that passion.

II

Puritanism and Art

THE real question that lies behind all controversy about art and Puritanism is this: Ought we to regard art as one of the chief activities of the human race; or should we make it subordinate to morals or to science? We must determine that question before we can ask ourselves whether we approve or condemn the action of any particular Puritan in any particular age. For there have always been Puritans since there has been art, though some may have been less forbidding than others. Plato is on the side of the Puritans, and so is Tolstoy, since both hold that art is an activity subordinate to other things, and would not allow to the artist that freedom which he demands. Tolstoy's test of a work of art is whether it communicates certain emotions, which have a moral value, to the ordinary unsophisticated man. If, like the Choral Symphony or *King Lear*, it seems to him so difficult that the ordinary unsophisticated man cannot understand it, then, he says, it is not true art. His case is not quite clearly put. He would say, perhaps, that the aim of every true artist must be to

communicate such emotions to the ordinary unsophisticated man; and that if he is an artist, he cannot fail in that aim. But here at once we should find the artist, contending for his freedom, against him. The artist would say that his aim is to express his emotions in terms of beauty, and that he refuses to consider what the effect of that expression will be on the ordinary unsophisticated man or on any other. He, in the act of creation, is not considering his audience at all. He may consider them in a further critical process; but that is separate from the act of creation, which is altogether a process of expression. The freedom of the artist depends on this proposition—that a work of art is justified of itself without any thought of what its moral effect may be. In fact, we must have the same faith in art that we ought to have in morals or in science; we must not value any of them in terms of something else. Needless to say, the work of art must indeed be a work of art. The freedom of the artist does not involve the freedom of the pornographer, or the sentimentalist, or the charlatan, all of whom really value art in terms of something else just as much as the Puritan himself.

There is, of course, the obvious practical problem how the policeman or the magistrate is to distinguish the true artist from the pornographer; but that does not affect the main question. No man of sense would con-

tend that anyone who chooses to call himself an artist has a right to expand his unclean mind unto all, or that flagrantly indecent pictures should be distinguished from flagrantly indecent photographs merely because they are "done by hand." Sham works of art cannot claim the immunities of art at all; and the artist whose main purpose is to please, whether he aims at pleasing saints or sinners, is a sham artist. It is only a question of practical politics how far the policeman shall interfere with sham works of art. But it is a question that strikes down into the nature of things, whether he has a right to interfere with true works of art at all.

Some may say that it is a question which has no practical interest, since we can find no certain artistic test of a work of art. But, as with all such questions, consequences of great practical moment will sooner or later come of whatever answer is given to it. Indeed, a whole view of life is involved in either answer, which affects morals just as much as art. Those who support the absolute freedom of art are, even if they do not know it, mystics; and in their support of the absolute freedom of art is involved a support of the absolute freedom of morals and of science. On the other hand, those who would subordinate art to morals or to science, who would ask of a work of art whether it does good or increases knowledge, would also, on occasion, value morals and science in terms of something else.

They would refuse to the saint the freedom they refuse to the artist and to the discoverer of knowledge. If they ask what is the good of one of these, they will ask what is the good of all of them. At least, if they do make an exception in favour of one, it will be through whim, not through principle.

On the other hand, the mystic makes certain assumptions based upon faith. For him there are three absolute values in life; the value of goodness, the value of knowledge, and the value of art. There may always be a personal and practical problem for him and for every one else; which of these values on a particular occasion is to be subordinated to another of them? But that, he would say, each man must decide for himself as the particular occasion arises; the world cannot decide it for him in general terms. The world has no right to say that art must in all things be subordinate to morality. It must not impose upon the artist the duty of asking himself whether his work may possibly do moral harm to anyone, and of changing it if it may. The business of the artist is to express himself in terms of beauty; and he and the world must have faith in beauty, as they must have faith in goodness and in knowledge, though both may bring, not peace, but a sword. This faith is based upon a belief that all three—goodness, beauty, and knowledge—are equally necessary to the perfect life; and that in a perfect state of being they would

work together in complete harmony and be only different aspects of the same excellence. Here, because of the imperfection of our life, they can be separated and are sometimes in conflict with each other, so that one has to be sacrificed to another, and all are sometimes sacrificed to the material struggle for life. But the essence of faith is that it gives an absolute value to what is prophetic of a perfect state of being and will not think of it in terms of something else. Where it sees beauty it will not ask what is the good of it, any more than it will test holiness or knowledge by their material results.

But there is a higher as well as a lower lack of this mystical faith. The lower lack of it subordinates everything to the struggle for life and consents, even with gusto, to the predominance of material things. That is not Puritanism. It is not even worldliness. Rather we should call it earthliness. It has no particular dislike to art; indeed, it has justified art as a means, among others, of putting men at their ease on the earth, or as a pleasant by-product of the sexual instinct. Puritanism is further from this earthliness than from the exclusive worship of art or knowledge. There is an extreme form of Puritanism which hates the earth and all its works more even than it hates the world; which believes that nothing here is prophetic of a nobler state of being, that we know nothing of any kind of good except through angry messages from

God. To such Puritanism art is mere sinful waste of time, and the more delightful it is, the more sinful. But all Puritanism is not so savage as this, not exasperated by fear of God or hatred of the rich ; and yet, in so far as it refuses perfect freedom to art, the artist would call it hostile. Swinburne in his *William Blake* issued the artist's challenge to all who deny it complete freedom.

" One may add [he said] that if art can be destroyed it by all means ought to be. If, for example, the art of verse is not indispensable and indestructible, the sooner it is put out of the way the better. If anything can be done instead better worth doing than painting or poetry, let that preferable thing be done with all the might and haste that may be attainable. And if to live well be really better than to write or paint well, and a noble action more valuable than the greatest poem or the most perfect picture, let us have done at once with the meaner things that stand in the way of the higher."

There the case of art is put at its highest, and it is put against moderate as well as extreme Puritanism, against Tolstoy, and even Plato. But we may remark, lest Swinburne's contention seem obviously absurd, that he does not assert a great work of art to be morally as valuable as a noble action. He contends that it has an æsthetic value which is equal in all respects to the moral value of the action. This a host of great men of all

ages would deny; and the ordinary man would deny it, applying a practical test of value. But there he would be on ground as dangerous to goodness as to art. For goodness itself, if judged by a practical test, by its utility, loses its absolute value, and at the same time loses its glory and power over the soul, sinking to the level of proverbs, such as "Honesty is the best policy."

Thus the Puritan who finds an absolute value in goodness, a value apart even from the hope of Heaven, commits himself to a dangerous isolation if he refuses that value to anything else. He has no allies against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Those who should be his allies he counts among his enemies; and so it is with the fanatics for art who will allow it no rivals, and with the fanatics for knowledge. The Puritan has faith, of course; but he is timid in his faith. Goodness seems to him threatened by so many enemies in this world that he would have all men that are for it spend all their powers in direct defence of it, and he condemns all who do not. Thus he expects a work of art to be a weapon for the war against evil. It must have a practical use, which means a use imposed upon it and not arising out of its own natural excellence. And he will deny it excellence and regard it as mere trifling and waste of time if it has not this practical use. That is the position of Tolstoy, himself a great artist, but one whose faith has been narrowed

and driven in to its last defence by contemplation of the evils of the world. To him and to other great Puritans this life is like a leaking ship, and he cries, "All hands to the pumps!" But a larger faith sees value, and its own kind of value, in every excellence of man, and a connexion between all different excellences that will become closer and clearer in the future. It sees both the holiness of beauty and the beauty of holiness; and indeed it is impossible to see one without seeing the other. The passion for both is sacred, so long as it is pure; and so is the passion for knowledge.

But purity alone is what makes all three sacred, the purity of disinterestedness. The slightest taint of the desire for pleasure, or of the desire to give pleasure, robs art of its sacredness and its immunities; and this fact is implied in the final judgment of the world upon works of art. There is a kind of art which only comes into being because of the pleasure which the artist has got from other works of art. In producing it he tries to revive or prolong that pleasure. That is imitative art, which the world forgets. Again, there is art, more original, which tries to prolong in expression some pleasures of real life. And there is art which tries to give the same kind of pleasure to the audience or spectators. To both posterity is sometimes indulgent, sometimes contemptuous. It reserves its respect for the art which, whatever its subject may be, is the result of a desire neither to

give pleasure nor to experience it, neither to edify nor to instruct, but only to express in terms of beauty. Thus posterity respects the "Antiope" of Correggio because it knows that in that work the artist was not attempting either to give pleasure or to experience it through a representation of appetite or an appeal to it. He was expressing an emotion which one cannot put into words, but which the beauty of the picture justifies and communicates. For it is part of the faith in art to believe that the beauty of art is always the result of the expression of a disinterested emotion. The mere representation, or rather imitation, of beautiful things cannot produce that beauty at all; still less can the mere expression of appetite through representation. The world may be taken in for a time by such representations, and think that it sees the beauty of art in what is only a mere reminder of the beauty of reality. But sooner or later it will cease to be taken in and turn away to new reminders. Beauty that endures for centuries through all changes of fashion, like the beauty of the "Antiope," is beauty created by the artist in the expression of emotion and not merely imitated from beautiful things. It cannot provoke appetite, but rather, by communicating emotion, destroys appetite in those who have eyes to see it. As for those whose eyes minister only to their appetites, they must not expect the artist to consider them. The main institutions of

the world are devised, not for the halt, the maimed, and the blind; and art exists, if not for virgins and boys, still less for satyrs. This is a fact which even the noblest Puritans are apt to forget.

III

Art and Science

THERE is at present a confusion of thought about the relations between art and science which betrays itself in criticism of all the arts, raising obstacles to our experience of them and causing many industrious persons to waste their industry. This confusion cannot be ended by the mere assertions of artists, who often fall into it themselves. Being the result of a misuse of the intellect, only the intellect, rightly used, can destroy it. Pure thought will not enable us to experience a work of art, but it will remove obstacles to our experience set up by perverse thinking.

There is one relation between art and science which always has existed and always must exist—namely, the relation in which each is employed as a valuable but subsidiary ally to the other. The use of experience, in the arts as in other things, is scientific whenever it is intelligent; and experience, unlike inspiration, can be handed on from one artist to another. Architecture, for instance, could not exist without engineering, which tells the architect what he may venture to do and

what he may not. And, in the same subsidiary way, art is useful to the man of science whenever he wishes to communicate his ideas. Only from literature can he learn how to use language, which has been raised above its mere hand-to-mouth uses by literature, not by science. For instance, Huxley's power of writing was artistic, not scientific; and by means of it he was able not only to say but to know what he meant more clearly than most men of science. Indeed, there is something of the artist in every clear thinker, for it is delight in his instrument that enables him to think clearly. There is always power as well as knowledge in his expositions, and that power comes of the desire to say a thing as well as it can be said.

But this right relation between science and art has nothing to do with the confusion into which we have fallen; for that comes not of the right use of science and art as subsidiary allies to each other, but of the overweening and unscientific claims of science. These, since they are usually implied rather than expressed, are difficult to state precisely; yet one sees examples of them everywhere, and always they amount to this—that art can be completely understood and fully experienced by the intellect: that æsthetic experience, indeed, is a mere illusion, to be explained away by causes which the intellect is able to discover. Usually these claims betray themselves in one form or another of the fallacy of

origins, whether that fallacy takes a biological, a psychological, or an historical turn. The biological explanations assume that art exists because in some way or another it is useful in the struggle for life, and the psychological explanations attempt to apply this assumption in detail. Thus we are told that rhythm exists in poetry and music because it makes breathing easier; or that music has developed out of excited speech; or that all art is an unconscious and symbolic expression of the sexual instinct—that is where psychology comes to the help of biology. And then history takes up the tale, and explains an artist in terms of his environment and a work of art in terms of former works of the same kind.

But in all these explanations there is always one thing lacking—the only thing which matters to those who care for works of art more than for their origins. For while they instruct us in the origins or causes of art, they tell us nothing about the difference between good art and bad. Rhythm may make breathing easier, but there is true and false rhythm, and there is no reason to suppose that the false is less of an aid to breathing than the true. So, if all art is an expression of the sexual instinct, that is true both of *King Lear* and of the worst nonsense on the films; and so also the historical method may be applied alike to *Hamlet* and to the most worthless play by any Elizabethan; yet we are no nearer, at the end of it all, to knowing

why one thing is good and another bad, or even to knowing which is good and which is bad. Yet all these explanations and investigations might have some value if only we knew what they can explain and what they cannot. It is because we think they can explain everything that we are misled by them, and distracted from the immediate æsthetic experience of works of art into the pursuit of facts irrelevant to that experience.

Before, then, we have any dealing with explanations or investigations, we need to be clear in our minds on certain points, namely: that a work of art exists to be æsthetically experienced, not to be explained; that æsthetic experience is the only means by which we can attain to knowledge of the work of art itself; and, finally, that this experience is a delicate and precarious business, often prevented or interrupted by obstacles which we raise in our own minds. It is this last point which, if we have a firm grasp of the others, will help us to a right use of science even in the experience of works of art. For by means of science we may be able to remove obstructions to our experience of works of art, may discover the reasons why we are so often disposed to prefer bad art to good. There are some things which science can explain, both in works of art and in our feelings about them, but these are always negative: not art itself, but failure in art; and not æsthetic experience, but failures or errors in it.

Take, for instance, historical investigation. This is often blindly pursued in the belief that any fact about a great artist, or his great aunt, must have some undefined value ; or that his art can be fully explained in terms of its origins and material conditions. But if it were understood that the proper aim of the historic method, as applied to Shakespeare for instance, is to remove obstacles to the experience of his plays, there would be more discrimination in the use of that method. The commonest obstacle to the experience of works of art is a wrong expectation about them ; and most of us, used to the theatre of our own time, expect Shakespeare's plays to be written for it. We suppose that he was trying, and failing, to solve the problems solved by Sir Arthur Pinero ; but if we knew the conditions of the Elizabethan stage and the manner in which Shakespeare's plays were acted on it, we should know that his problem was different, and that often he solved it. We should come to him with right instead of wrong expectations, and so obstacles would be removed to our experience of his plays, and perhaps even to the right performance of them. But at the same time we should know, when once we had experienced his art, that it is not to be explained in terms of its conditions, like a cactus, which we explain as being a desert plant : he solved a particular problem, but it was he who solved it. There may be value in the study of influences also, if you do not suppose that

a great artist is made by them : the interest lies in what he made of them, not in what they made of him ; and that is where he differs from bad artists, who are uninteresting because they are made by their influences. But if the study of influences and conditions takes no account of this difference and treats all artists as if they were moulded by a mechanical process of evolution, it is irrelevant and misleading.

So it is also with the biological-psychological method. That has value only when employed in a negative way, to explain failure in art and error in æsthetic experience, not art itself nor true æsthetic experience. At present it is often employed so perversely, and with results so monstrous, as to provoke a general impatience of all psychology ; but this perversity comes of an arrogant ignorance of the first principles of æsthetic. If they can be grasped by the psychologist, his science may remove obstructions to the experience and even to the production of works of art. So long as he tells us that all art is an unconscious expression of the sexual instinct, he tells us nothing that is of any value to us. He asserts merely that something is happening in a dark, unknown region, the result of which, when it reaches the light, is a work of art. But, as everything else which reaches the light is also, according to him, a result of the same cause working in darkness, we are left with a general and unconvincing statement about

everything. Yet this statement, if it were confined to certain kinds of failure in art, might help us to understand them. For it is probable that failures in art have causes in the unconscious ; and psychology may in time be able to discover these causes and the connexion between them and their effects with precision. Thus, the unconscious working of the sexual instinct may be the cause of many failures in art—for instance, of the forbidding sentimentality of some religious pictures. This revolts instead of charming us, because we are aware of something in the picture other than what the artist himself consciously intends. The furtive appetite which peeps through this mask of devotion is trying to infect us by false pretences ; and so, unless we wish to share the appetite, we refuse to be moved by the devotion and are troubled and disgusted by a lack of unanimity in the artist's mind. It is as if he were not quite sane, as if something said under the influence of that religious drug betrayed not a self, but an instinct destroying the unity of the self. Behind all this show of the artist and the devotee there is a monkey, and a sentimental monkey is something not to be endured. But there may be a sentimental monkey lurking in us too ; in which case we shall like to be deceived by the show of devotion. While our appetites are furtively tickled, we, too, shall believe that we are experiencing a religious emotion. Hence the long popularity of that Magdalen of Titian's

who, as Ruskin said, looks as if she hoped to get to heaven by dint of her personal charms.

But there is all the difference in the world between this ambiguous concealment, or betrayal, of appetite and those great and simple works of art which are openly concerned with sex. Sex, for instance, is the theme of Correggio's "Antiope," not its secret preoccupation. We scent nothing in that picture other than what the painter consciously intends. He was unanimous when he conceived and executed it, and we are unanimous and untroubled in our experience of it. Further, in this case, and in all great works of art where sex is the theme, it seems to be only a way into that state of being which all great art, no matter what its theme, creates. In a moment we are beyond the subject, beyond all those frank allurements of beautiful flesh, in the paradise of which Correggio was really dreaming. It is like love music in which the passion is freed from its object and the love lost in the beauty of the music. By this power of escape all great art may be known; and, so far from being an unconscious expression of sex, it consciously uses sex, like all other human passions and concrete things, as a way into the Holy of holies.

If psychologists, by the experience of great works of art, could make themselves aware of this distinction between true and false art, they might gradually achieve discoveries of much practical value; for the cause of bad

art, when it is not merely incompetent but a perversion of technical skill, is, we may guess, always some unconscious and not artistic purpose in the mind of the artist. This purpose need not, of course, be sexual; there are many different kinds of egotism that may lead an artist astray. In some way he may wish to justify himself to himself, or to express some grievance either against a particular person or against society, or some weakness in his character; and some defect in his experience caused by that weakness, may be hiding, and indeed flattering, itself in his art. In any case there is something in that art besides the artistic effort and at odds with it, something which prevents artistic unanimity and so freedom and power of conception. But the task of psychology should be not merely to discover, what we know already, that all defects of character *may* be expressed in art, but to find out why in some cases they injure the work of art and in others they do not. It is clear, since men with many obvious defects of character have been great artists while other men with many virtues have given their lives to an art and failed in it, that genius and virtue are not identical. What we have to discover, then, is the particular weakness of character that causes other weaknesses to be fatal to the work of art. We have a clue, perhaps, in the fact that it is suppressed sex, and not sex chosen consciously as a theme, which makes a work of art unpleasantly

sexual. It may be that the artist needs always to know himself before he can know other people and things ; that he must practise a certain frankness with himself which is not so necessary in the practical business of life, even in morals.

The condition of all spiritual activities is disinterestedness ; but the peculiar need of the artist is disinterestedness of feeling rather than of conduct or thought. As we distrust a man who acts always with an eye to his own interests, so we distrust a work of art which seems to lack integrity of emotion. Emotion, we know, ought to be controlled by a man's permanent values ; his effort should be to make it independent of his passing needs or the momentary demands of his ego. But there are artists in all the arts, and often of great executive skill, who allow these passing needs and momentary demands to control their values and their emotions, without even being aware of that control. The æsthetic region of the mind cannot be subject to reason, but it should be subject to that detachment from self out of which reason itself arises ; for it is only by such detachment that we can attain to full contact with external reality. Emotions themselves are honest, are earned, are the material of good art, only when the artist has lost himself in that which arouses the emotion. Otherwise the whole world of his creation will be made after his own image, will be twisted and garbled to confirm his

own conceit of himself. Bad artists often have a passion for confession; but what they confess is false, not in fact, but in feeling and in all the means by which feeling is expressed. And this falsity, this unconscious, egoistic, and perverting purpose, we feel and resent even though we cannot name it or its cause. We feel and resent it in pictures and in music, however deeply hidden it may be, no less than in literature. The ring of false confession can be detected as surely in a tune as in a plot: the exorbitant, self-deceiving ego will pervert notes no less than events; and in a picture it will lay a false emphasis and drag out a false rhythm. Further, there may be something in us that responds to this falsity, for that which causes bad art causes also the liking for it. Just as the bad artist is eager to deceive himself, so his audience is eager to be deceived by him. And the sudden, enormous success of certain bad works of art —novels, plays, pictures, or music—is to be explained only by a momentary identity of demand for some kind of self-deception in the artist and in his audience. It is like the case of the Russian legend, which every one was ready to believe because it gave the comfort needed at the moment. Certain bad works of art have the same momentary power: have the deep irrational illusion of dreams, because, like dreams, they are wish-fulfilments or compensations. The common mind rushes to accept them because they seem to

confirm its own desires and delusions. That is luck for the bad artist, a luck which neither he nor his audience understands; so that he and every one else wonders when, as often happens, his next work is an utter failure, because in it he tells some æsthetic falsehood that his public has no wish to believe.

Thus we have tried, very roughly and doubtfully, to apply science, not to art, but to failures in art and to failures and errors in the experience of it. We must confess that our conjectures are founded on a knowledge so vague and scanty that they do not deserve to be called science; and we would ask the reader, not to accept them, but only to consider the principle on which they are formed. The principle is that bad art and the liking for bad art have causes in the unconscious which can be discovered, and which, being irrelevant to art and to æsthetic experience, can, when discovered, be removed. But art itself and real æsthetic experience have no such causes. Science must leave them alone, must make no attempt to explain them in terms of something else; for, if it does, it ceases to be science and becomes bad æsthetic and, indeed, bad metaphysic.

IV

The Razor of Croce

THOSE who have read the *Æsthetic* of Benedetto Croce will approach these essays upon three poets[1] with eagerness and apprehension. When philosophers write of æsthetic, we ask whether they themselves have experienced works of art; and often some little thing escapes them which makes us doubt it. In æsthetic, as in theology, it is easy to be thinking, formidably and with precision, about nothing, as in art itself it is easy, with momentum and coherence, to draw nothing. There are facts somewhere in the distance, but the mental process of the philosopher is ignorantly impatient of them, and it impresses us only so long as we too are content to ignore the facts.

In this book Croce deliberately puts his æsthetic to the test; if we ask the question, Does it help him to experience works of art? he here gives us an answer, and the answer is, Yes. Never have we read a better essay on Shakespeare, one that will help the reader

[1] *Ariosto, Shakespeare, and Corneille*, by Benedetto Croce. Translated by Douglas Ainslie. (Allen & Unwin. 10s. 6d. net.)

more to experience Shakespeare's art. Like the other two essays, it is an illustration of critical method, but it is also a fine piece of particular criticism. Croce's implied thesis is that we cannot do without philosophy in the experience of art, and he maintains it by showing how philosophy removes obstacles to that experience. There are many who suppose that for sensibility to works of art we need nothing but sensibility, and that confronted with a work of art we must not think, but need only feel. That is one form of the belief that for the conduct of life we need only common sense. The man in the street thinks that by means of his common sense he can get on well enough without the philosopher, because he does not know his own history, and how philosophy, the intellectual, moral, and practical courage of men whose names he has never heard, has rescued him from his own natural superstitions. But for the philosophers he would still be cutting himself with knives at the altar of some image of his own common-sense terrors; he would still be the man in the cave. But common sense is just as prolific of error about art as about other things; there superstition takes the form of pedantry; and Croce begins his essay on Shakespeare with an enumeration of lunacies which can be cured only by a true æsthetic. You may say that these are the lunacies of professional critics; but the critic without philosophy is only a man in the street who,

thinking hard about Shakespeare, thinks astray because he has no philosophy. That same perversity which produced human sacrifice to idols in the past still produces the sacrifice of art to pedantry; and now the razor of Croce is used to cut all that pedantry away, not with impulsive ridicule, but with clear, irresistible logic.

Watching the process, we wonder at the vivacity and copiousness of the philosopher. How can he, amid all his high abstract labours, have found time to read, or even to be aware of, all the nonsense that has been written about Shakespeare? Like Shakespeare himself, he has a zest for fools though of a different kind. His delight, too clear and untroubled to be ill-natured, is in showing that they are fools because they have no philosophy. If only they had it, they would not write speculative biographies of Shakespeare; they would not turn from the sonnets to proving that Mr. W. H. means Mr. William himself, or from Hamlet to proving that the Prince of Denmark was really a woman; nor would they show their admiration of Shakespeare by insisting that he was a moralist, a philosopher, or Francis Bacon. Croce actually enjoys these lunacies, and, like a philosopher, explains why he enjoys them: they are "an involuntarily ironic treatment" of a wrong method which they reduce to an absurdity. But, when you are wrong, it is better to be an out-and-out lunatic than a cautious pedant,

for then the wrongness of your method exposes itself, almost artistically, in your lunacy. The most dangerous bad criticism is that in which a wrong æsthetic is hidden, as, for instance, in Mr. Frank Harris's book on Shakespeare, which Croce mentions as an instance of the assumption that whatever happens in the plays happened also to Shakespeare himself. Here the very ingenuity is dangerous instead of being useful, because it is based on a wrong æsthetic. If Mr. Harris had written a romance, all would have been well; but, because he has made a romance out of his own experience of Shakespeare and then confused it with criticism, the better the romance the worse the criticism. So it is with the many less erratic but more insidiously perverse criticisms of *Hamlet*. The commentator who tells us that Hamlet was really a woman does little harm; but when Mr. T. S. Eliot, having read Mr. J. M. Robertson's book on *Hamlet*, comes to the conclusion that "the play is most certainly an artistic failure" because it is a stratification and represents the efforts of a series of men, each making what he could out of the work of his predecessors, then he may do mischief by drawing the attention of readers away from the play itself to other plays not extant. The only document we need for the full experience of Hamlet is *Hamlet*: we may, if we choose, concern ourselves with the question of its relation to other *Hamlets* which have not sur-

vived; but that concern is not æsthetic, and should not be set up as an obstacle to our experience of the play. From all these mistakes Mr. Eliot, like many other commentators, would have been preserved by a right æsthetic.

Why is it that we so often set up obstacles to our own experience of works of art? Because we make some practical demand upon them which, being works of art, they cannot satisfy. Mr. Eliot, for instance, demands that Hamlet shall explain himself psychologically; because he has not done so, because it remains possible to speculate about him psychologically, he supposes that Shakespeare has failed to tell us what he ought to have told us. But Hamlet puzzles us if we choose to ask psychological questions about him, just because Shakespeare knew with æsthetic certainty what would happen within his particular mind in those particular circumstances. The very certainty troubles us if we are not content with it. We begin to ask the poet—How do you know this? With a practical, scientific purpose, we make irrelevant demands upon him; and then we tell him that he is not an artist. Another irrelevant and practical demand is made by Tolstoy, and all those who complain that Shakespeare is not a poet of ideals. There are, Croce says:

> Unsatisfied desires that take fire in the minds of the right-thinking, urging them always to ask of any very great man for something more, for a supplement. They conclude

> their admiration with a sigh that there should really be something missing in him—he is not to be numbered among those who strive for more liberal political forms, and for a more equable social balance, nor has he bowels of compassion for the humble and plebeian.

They too are seeking the practical in a work of art, and complaining because they do not get it.

Now it is very hard for the natural man, the man in the street, not to demand the practical in some form or other in a work of art. But it is also a necessary discipline for his soul that he should cease to demand it, so that he may escape into that other world of art where the practical is not. For the practical, while necessary in its place, is also limiting; so long as we are concerned with it, even our observation is limited to what will serve our particular and immediate practical purpose. But the artist is one who frees himself from all practical purposes and their limitations, and so is able to observe a tree, a cow, or the universe with different eyes, because with a different mind. This freedom of his is not negative, for, if it were, he would see nothing. It is positive, being a freedom of his spirit from practical purpose. It may be said that he observes with the practical purpose of producing a work of art; but that is an error. The work of art is the result of observation, or rather experience, with no

practical purpose; notebook art smells of the notebook, and painting from models of the model. Art itself is a proof that the spirit's freedom from practical purposes is positive; for it is the positive product of that freedom, it is the very experience which the artist makes when he is free. But, if we are to experience it, we also must be free from practical demands, must understand that they are irrelevant to the experience of a work of art, which is itself a state of freedom positive, not negative, active, not passive. And for this understanding, for the enjoyment of this great freedom, we need a training of the whole mind, intellectual and even moral, as well as æsthetic.

The whole man is made by the exercise of all his spiritual activities; but philosophy teaches him what is the province of each, teaches him not to be moral, or intellectual, or æsthetic in the wrong place. When a man is moral where he ought to be æsthetic, he is losing his spiritual freedom; and the loss betrays itself at once in a perversion or limitation of art. The essay on Corneille, with its search for Corneille's peculiar but limited excellence, reaches the conclusion that it is limited because there was in him a too practical passion for judgment.

> It is well known [Croce says] that the sovereign passion, the pain that renders mute, the love that leads to raving, impede the dream of the poet, they impede artistic treat-

> ment, the cult of perfect form and the joy in beauty. There is too a form of passion which has in it something of the practical : it is more occupied with embodying its favourite dreams, in order to obtain from them stimulus and incentive, than with fathoming them poetically and idealizing them in contemplation.

So from Corneille's works we get, besides "the impression of seriousness and severity," another impression of "the disquieting presence of men firmly fixed and rooted in an ideal"—that is to say, of men who express the practical judgments rather than the free and full experience of the poet. What Corneille valued above all things was "deliberation and resolution," with the result that

> he either did not love or refused to allow himself to love anything else in the world, and lost interest in all the rest of life. He did not surpass it ideally, in which case he would have remained trembling and living in its presence . . . but he drove it out or cut it off altogether. . . . Having abolished all other forms of life, he found nothing before him but a series of situations for deliberation, vigorously felt, warmly expressed, sung with full voice, and illustrated with energetic and becoming gestures.

This is an example of Croce's method employed to explain defects of art—he knows, of course, that it will not explain positive beauties, which are inexplicable ; and this example shows what a good use he can make of

psychology, which, without a right æsthetic, is apt to ask irrelevant questions about the characters in a drama, and to give still more irrelevant answers. There is a psychological problem in the defects of every artist—the problem why he has failed to obtain complete spiritual freedom in his art, what is the practical purpose that limits it; but the solution of this problem is to be found only in his art, and only by those who have experienced it æsthetically; it is not to be found by regarding his characters, if he is a dramatist, as if they were real people, or his art as if it were a practical activity.

But this book has another interest in that, being applied philosophy, it is more personal and reveals more of Croce himself than his works of pure philosophy. Since here he is concerned with actual, passionate things, he sometimes betrays passion and, writing of art, becomes almost an artist. There is one place where, speaking of the pretended love for Shakespeare expressed in the pedantries of the age "which is perhaps now drawing to a close," he permits himself an outburst:

> In this age the consciousness of the distinction between liberty and passion, good and evil, nobility and vileness, fineness and sensuality, between the lofty and the base in man, became obscured; everything was conceived as differing in quantity, but identical in substance, and was placed in a deterministic relation with the external world.

> In such an atmosphere artistic work became blind, diseased, gloomy, instinctive; struggling for expression amid the torment of sick senses, no longer amid passionate, moral, struggles of the soul; confused writers, half pedantic, half neurasthenic, were taken for, and believed themselves to be, the heirs of Shakespeare. Even when one reads some of the most highly praised pages of the critics of the day upon Shakespeare, so abounding in exquisite refinements, a sort of repugnance comes over one, as though a warning that this is not the genuine Shakespeare. He was less subtle, but more profound; less involved, but more complex, and more great than they.

Croce cannot speak calmly of determinism when he comes to close quarters with it in art, because he knows that determinists are, mysteriously, by their creed determined; it makes them what they believe themselves to be; and, in art, the wages of that sin is death. For the art of a determinist age is more and more at the mercy of the unconscious, and even takes a pride in being so; it becomes "blind, diseased, gloomy, instinctive," and, what is more, impoverished, for the unconscious, in art as in dreams, is parasitic on the conscious; it merely contorts, without knowing why, what previous free and conscious art has achieved. By this contortion it may produce a dreamlike, irrational vividness which is mistaken for design; but men weary quickly of such automatism, and violence

succeeds violence in blind reaction, like fashions in dress, which change because each one of them reduces some unconscious caprice to an absurdity. In art violence goes with deficiency, and our art becomes more and more violent as it is more and more impoverished in content; the very aim of our most "artistic" art is to empty itself of content, and we have at last poets who can do nothing but puke, like babies unable to digest their food.

The remedy, or one remedy, is a right æsthetic. As we become more and more aware of our artistic impotence, we may seek that remedy, and by means of it find our way back to a general sanity. We have now, for more than one generation, put our trust in mechanism, which, as Croce says, is poetically a cold, incoherent, absurd thing, though practically rational and coherent. We have, ourselves, tried to become machines, rational and coherent for some practical task such as killing each other or moving rapidly from place to place; but in that endeavour we become poetically, and not merely in our poetry but in all our spiritual life, cold, incoherent, and absurd. Of this fact our art, being the first and most signal symptom, warns us; it fails to satisfy even our suppressed and denied spirits. So the greatest minds are now concerned with æsthetic; for they must concern themselves with a common human disease, and they must study it in

its most obvious symptoms. In this book, through all its philosophic calm, we feel the longing for a free, conscious, and happy art; and Shakespeare is to Croce not merely an æsthetic document, but a spirit such as he would himself be.

V

Poets on Poetry

THE worst of perverse attacks upon poetry is that they are apt to infect with their own perversity answers to them made even by poets. Peacock's "Four Ages of Poetry" is bound up with Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" and with Browning's "Essay on Shelley," with a useful introduction by Mr. H. F. Brett-Smith, in the third of the Percy Reprints[1]; and Peacock and Shelley ought to be read together by those who would understand the defects of Shelley's "Defence." Peacock, whose real aim was to vex the poets of the Romantic movement and particularly those of the Lake School, maintained that poetry was obsolete. It was, he said:

> The mental rattle that awakened the attention of intellect in the infancy of civil society; but for the maturity of mind to make a serious business of the playthings of its childhood is as absurd as for a full-

[1] *Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry*; *Shelley's Defence of Poetry*; *Browning's Essay on Shelley*. Edited by H. F. B. Brett-Smith. (Oxford: Blackwell. 4s. 6d. net.)

> grown man to rub his gums with coral, and cry to be charmed to sleep by the jingle of silver bells.

Now it is likely that he got this particular insult to poetry and the poets from Sidney's "Apology"; for Sidney, answering an earlier attack which maintained that poetry was useless, attempted to prove that it was useful by saying in its defence just what Peacock said against it. Poetry, Sidney says, "hath been the first lightgiver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk, by little and little, enables them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges." To this Peacock could, and did, reply that now we do not need that nurse or her milk; we can digest the tougher knowledge ourselves. So dangerous is it to maintain that poetry is useful or justified by its use.

Peacock, except that he is short and amusing, reminds us of Max Nordau. His main contention is that poetry, to use the jargon of Nordau, is all atavism.

> A poet in our times is a semi-barbarian in a civilized community. He lives in the days that are past. His ideas, thoughts, feelings, associations, are all with barbarous manners, obsolete customs, and exploded superstitions.

And then, in a passage which particularly provoked Shelley, he contrasts the poet's frame of mind with "the philosophic mental tranquillity which looks round with an equal

eye on all external things." In fact he maintains that the reason has superseded the imagination, which is now merely a nuisance; and Shelley's "Defence" contends, on the contrary, that the imagination is still as necessary to man as ever it was.

The best part of Peacock's "Essay" is his attack on the Romantic poets. He does hit the weakness of Romantic poetry, namely, that it tries to interest us through strangeness of circumstance.

> Mr. Scott digs up the poachers and cattle-stealers of the ancient border. Lord Byron cruises for thieves and pirates on the shores of the Morea and among the Greek islands. Mr. Southey wades through ponderous volumes of travels and old chronicles, from which he carefully selects all that is false, useless, and absurd, as being essentially poetical;

and so on. He attacks the Lake poets because they try to live poetically so that they may write poetry, and because living poetically for them means escaping from civilization.

> The mountains are natural, therefore we will live in the mountains. There we shall be shining models of purity and virtue, passing the whole day in the innocent and amiable occupation of going up and down hill, receiving poetical impressions and communicating them in immortal verse to admiring generations.

There is some truth in this too, though Peacock afterwards recanted; but he was wrong,

and probably not serious, in his general contention that these defects of a particular kind of poetry proved poetry itself to be obsolete; and it was this contention that Shelley answered in his "Defence."

Unfortunately Shelley, like Sidney, tried to answer the charge that poetry was useless by maintaining that it was useful, and fell into the very errors of Peacock by attempting to value it in terms of something else. Thus he says that poets are "the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society and the inventors of the arts of life"—in fact, that they are everything useful and admirable. Further, warming to his task, he says not only that poets are philosophers and historians, but also that philosophers and historians are poets. Plato was a poet; Bacon was a poet; Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy were poets. But here the very examples make him hesitate, and he adds:

> Although the plan of these writers, especially that of Livy, restrained them from developing this faculty in its highest degree, they made copious and ample amends for their subjection by filling all the interstices of their subjects with living images.

So, in spite of himself, he states the essential difference between the poet and the historian or philosopher. They have a different plan, or aim, to which they are not "subject," but which is freely chosen by them, and

which not only restrains them from developing the poetic faculty in its highest degree, but also impels them to develop their own, different, faculties. No doubt there is something of the poet in great philosophers and historians; but they are philosophers and historians because the poet in them remains subsidiary, just as philosophy or history are subsidiary to the poet. Shelley sees this when he is trying to define, not to defend, poetry. "Language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action," he says, "are the instruments and materials of poetry"; and so living images are the instruments and materials of philosophy and history. No doubt a poet is greater for having a philosophy, as for any riches of the mind; and a philosopher is greater for a command of living images, since they come of an intense experience of all that subject-matter about which he thinks; but poet and philosopher remain distinct, because the instruments and materials of the one are the finished product of the other. Shelley was led to minimize the difference between the philosopher and the poet by a peculiarity of his own art and by the unconscious desire to justify it where it needed no justification; and in doing so he fell into an æsthetic heresy. There is a part of his "Defence" in which he denies that particularity is the very essence of all art, although he confesses that the greatest poets have "made use of it." He is troubled by the

fact that poets such as Homer and Shakespeare describe even vicious characters with gusto; it is contrary to his own Platonism, and he tries to apologize for it thus:

> A poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover, without concealing, the eternal proportions of their beauty. An epic or dramatic personage is understood to wear them around his soul, as he may the ancient armour or modern uniform around his body; whilst it is easy to conceive a dress more graceful than either.

And then the heresy betrays itself clearly in this sentence:

> Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour; and it is doubtful whether the alloy of costume, habit, etc., be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears.

So he regards all circumstance, detail, individuality, as a concession to one weakness which the poet would avoid if he could.

But the poet's conception is not, of its nature, "naked," like the philosopher's—that is to say, it cannot be expressed in general or abstract terms. It includes, from the start and in itself, all the circumstance in which it is expressed. There is no "naked truth" in *Hamlet*; try to separate Shakespeare's conception from the details in which it is

expressed, the imperfections of Hamlet himself and the vices of the court, and nothing remains. Shakespeare did not temper his planetary music for mortal ears with any alloy of custom or habit; what Shelley calls the alloy is the music itself; and, in attempting to apologize for it, he misunderstands the process even of his own poetry. For he was fired by certain philosophic concepts, as other poets are fired by actions or characters; but these concepts were, in his own words, the instruments and materials of his poetry; they were in themselves no more his planetary music than actual people or things were Shakespeare's planetary music. In fact, for him they were the actual world, just as people and things were the actual world for Shakespeare; and he was a poet because he made poetry of them as Shakespeare made poetry of people and things. But in that poetry they are no more naked than any conception is naked in Shakespeare:

> Lamp of Earth, where'er thou movest,
> Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
> And the souls of whom thou lovest
> Walk upon the winds with lightness.
> Till they fail, as I am failing,
> Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing!

There is a philosophic idea in that verse, and in the whole lyric which it concludes; but the value of the lyric is not in the "naked truth" of the idea; and, if the music is

planetary, it is because it is music, because the idea has ceased to be philosophy and has become poetry.

Of course Shelley knew this really, and he says it at the very beginning of his "Defence." There he defends imagination against the tyranny of reason which Peacock would set up.

> According to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced; and the latter as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity.

And, he adds, "Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole." Here Shelley at once hits upon the difference between poetry, and indeed all art, and the activities of the reason. Poetry, based on the perception of values, is the expression of values; whereas philosophy, even when it is concerned with values, as it often is, does not express them immediately but examines and perhaps asserts them; and, whereas the expression of values is essential to poetry, the assertion of values is not essential to philosophy or to any purely intellectual activity.

The poet is concerned with what he himself values, for that alone is what he can immediately express; but the philosopher is concerned, if with value at all, with what can be proved universally of value. Shelley, in the lyric from which we have quoted, is not trying to prove the truth of his philosophic idea; it is to him only a means by which he expresses his value for that which he calls the "Life of Life," the "Lamp of Earth," and which is as real to him as men and women are to Shakespeare. And as Shakespeare must express his sense of the value of certain characters and actions by drawing them, so Shelley must express his sense of the value of this "Life of Life" by drawing it, or her. The "living images" he uses are indeed living; and they are, not an alloy, but the poem itself, the very representation, in the terms of his art, of that "Life of Life" which he must draw for us because he values it, or her, so passionately.

Further, value cannot be expressed directly except in art and in the terms of some particular art. Verse has come into being as the expression of value. I can say that I value something in dull prose just as I can say that it is a fine day; but that is merely a statement of fact, itself of no interest either intellectual or æsthetic. If I would express my value, there must be the formal qualities of some kind of art in my expression; and the more intense and pure my expression of

value, the more, if language is my medium, will it tend to be verse. We may say indeed that, though no sharp division can be made between verse and prose, there is not the pure expression of value even in poetical prose, but an admixture of some other purpose which prevents the language from flowing into the form natural to the expression of value. Shelley says of reason that it "regards the relations of things simply as relations; considering thoughts, not in their integral unity but as the algebraical representations which conduct to certain general results"; and clearly, the consideration of thoughts as algebraical representations will produce a statement of the same character, naked, generalized, and utterly different from the expression of values with its living images and characteristic particularities. The common notion that poetry is vaguer and emptier than prose arises partly because there is so much bad verse, and partly because poetry, through its very precision and particularity, selects more sharply than verse. But of all forms of speech poetry is the most definite, both in matter and in form; indeed the very definiteness of its form expresses the definiteness of its matter. Shelley himself has been called a vague poet, because what he says is usually said vaguely by others; but it is the peculiar excellence of his poetry that he can say precisely what others say vaguely or generally:

Bright reason will mock thee
Like the sun from a wintry sky.

This is a statement in poetry of what he says philosophically in his defence of poetry; but here, because it has passed from philosophy to poetry, it is expressed in a living image, with particularity. Reason *is* to him the sun from a wintry sky, and the lines are a good example of his saying that "imagination respects the similitudes of things." For whatever imagination deals with becomes real to it and is expressed in terms of things seen, heard, or felt. Shelley, if he had considered this and many other examples in his own verse, would have seen that there is no question of hiding naked truth and splendour or of tempering planetary music with an alloy; rather the thought comes to life as men and women come to life in Shakespeare's plays, because it is drawn with the precision of passion.

As for the justification of this process, it needs none, and none can be found for it; one might as well try to justify justice and truth. Like these, poetry, and all art, is one of the ends of life; not that every man must be a poet or an artist, but that no mind is fully mind which does not respond æsthetically to the experience of life, does not feel the sense of value or prize any clear and intense expression of it. It is only when we begin to think, and to think perversely, that we question the value of poetry or any art. Primitive peoples practise the arts without asking such

questions about them, as they eat and drink. Yet the questions are worth asking, because they lead to precise statements of the value of art and turn what was only instinct into faith. While Peacock was saying that poetry was obsolete, the poets were enriching it with new intellectual material; Shelley, for instance, was making poetry out of concepts that once had been the property only of philosophers. Poetry may become obsolete if it ceases to be poetry and becomes mere verse making; but, while it remains a living art, it makes discoveries like science, turning novelties of thought into novelties of art, digesting and transforming them for its own purpose. Browning, in his "Essay on Shelley," has a fine passage on this process of poetry, where he speaks of "thought and passion lavished by the poet on the else incompleted magnificence of the sunset, the else uninterpreted mystery of the lake." And so, we may say, the poet lavishes his thought and passion on the else incompleted magnificence of philosophy, the else uninterpreted discoveries of science; for to the poet these become facts of experience like the lake or the sunset, and equally subject to his own process of the expression of values. And Browning has a passage, equally fine, upon the difficult, and so often misunderstood, relation of morals to art:

> Greatness in a work [he says] suggests an adequate instrumentality; and none of the

> lower incitements, however they may avail to initiate or even effect many considerable displays of power, simulating the nobler inspiration to which they are mistakenly referred, have been found able, under the ordinary conditions of humanity, to task themselves to the end of so exacting a performance as a poet's complete work.

In poetry there is a digesting and transforming of morality no less than of thought; to the great poet morality also is a fact of experience like the sunset or the lake; it is no longer something that says to him—Do this, but something that demands to be represented in living images, like Shelley's "Life of Life." In *King Lear* Shakespeare does not say—Do this or do that; nor is there any question of rewards and punishments, for tragedy is not concerned with these; it is no more legal than it is philosophic. But good and evil come to life in Cordelia and Goneril and are real because identical with human beings, as bright reason in Shelley's poem is identical with the sun in a wintry sky. Nor could Shakespeare have written *King Lear* if his observation of human beings, his interest in them, and his value for them had not been in terms of morals. The story of *King Lear* without the characters thus conceived and drawn in moral terms would be a mere diagram; there is, in fact, no such thing as a story except in the form in which it is actually told by an artist; and in telling it

he cannot free himself from his own moral values and convictions and experience, even if he would.

It was well to bind up Browning's "Essay" with the other two; for its subject is really the nature of poetry and it reads as if it had been written as a comment on Shelley's "Defence." Though, like that "Defence," it is not the work of an expert philosopher, it also is far ahead of the æsthetic philosophy of the time. Browning, like Shelley, knew what he was talking about when he talked of poetry; and both should be read by philosophers more eagerly and carefully than the works of most other philosophers.

VI

The Poetry of Blake

THE poems of William Blake have been printed at the Florence Press[1] and edited by Dr. John Sampson with the text of his Oxford edition of 1905. It is pleasant to read them in the fine type designed by Herbert Horne; and we are glad of a pretext to write about them, apart from the Prophetic Books—to consider him only as a poet.

You may say that he is a poet also in the Prophetic Books; but one cannot write about them without discussing his doctrine, and those who value them most highly insist that unless that doctrine is understood they are unintelligible. Some insist also that one cannot understand the poems without understanding the doctrine; but to enjoy poetry is to understand it, and anyone who cares for poetry at all can enjoy the best of Blake's verse. It is true that a doctrine mystical, profound, and passionately held gives power and richness to his simplest music; but the music is there for anyone to hear. There

[1] *The Poems of William Blake.* Edited and arranged with a preface by John Sampson. (Chatto & Windus. 15s. net.)

is a continuity of faith in the *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience*, as in the sayings of Christ; they are all exclamations of the same proud, yet tender, dogmatic mind; but they have their value for us not because of the dogma, but because he has made poems out of the fact of that dogma. There is no other poet who has so great a fame based upon poems so short; and it was, no doubt, his faith, always present and acting in his mind, which enabled him to make short poems so large. He could see a world in a grain of sand, and Heaven in a wild flower; he could hold infinity in the palm of his hand and eternity in an hour, because individual things meant to him always the universal, in which he put his trust; and that is why we feel that universal in his little individual poems. Herrick is a charming poet, but there is only some particular experience in any poem of his, or some particular fancy. "Infant Joy" may look as slight as any poem of Herrick's, but listen to it:

> 'I have no name:
> I am but two days old.'
> What shall I call thee?
> 'I happy am,
> Joy is my name.'
> Sweet joy befall thee!
> Pretty Joy!
> Sweet Joy, but two days old.
> Sweet Joy I call thee:
> Thou dost smile,
> I sing the while,
> Sweet joy befall thee!

The difference is in the very tune, and we can hear it without being learned in Blake's doctrine. "All bells of Paradise we hear them a-ring" in that song, because Blake could live in a Paradise of thought which comes to us, as if from a distance, in the celestial chime of his words. Each poem is a tune from that Paradise, yet each satisfies by itself, and we need no key to it because it is a poem.

It is Blake's peculiarity that he could warble his native wood-notes wild about the very nature of the universe. More than any other poet, he was occupied with that; yet the result was songs such as other poets make about love or flowers. In the *Poetical Sketches*, said to have been all written before he was twenty, he revives the Elizabethan song like a master rather than a scholar; he was a poet with an unsurpassed music before he was a mystic, and his mysticism was the faith that came of his poetic experience. He said himself: "As the true method of knowledge is experiment, the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences." He experienced as a poet, and, we may guess, he tested the truth of his beliefs by his power of expressing them as poetry. "If it were not for the poetic or prophetic character the philosophic and experimental would . . . stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again." When he discovered, he sang, and song was, for him, the

proof of discovery. So his lips seem to be touched with the truth, and in his verse it turns purely to music. A vast commentary might be written upon the famous poem in the Preface to "Milton"; there is prose before it which tells us through what unexpected processes of thought Blake rose to it; but the poem itself is one that any reader can apply to his own time and his own experience. It might be engraved in the choir of any church as a love song of religion; for there is the music of love in it as if it had been written by a poet to his mistress.

So it is another peculiarity of Blake that he is both the most passionate and the most impersonal of poets. Unlike Shelley, who was also a poet of ideas, he purges himself of the personal in doggerel. He had his grievances against particular persons; there were things in his life that irked him, and his ego needed some indulgence when it was wounded. This he gave it in ribald verses which are often silly and which, by their very manner, prove that he meant to throw them off, and with them the feelings which provoked them. But these feelings, thus utterly separated from the real life of his mind, do not come into his serious art. In that there is a detachment, almost oriental, from casual passions and events and circumstances, without any personal outcries or laughter or tears of the moment. Life for him was a kind of mystery-play which he watched to discover the meaning

of the mystery, and events that happened to himself were only part of it. Thus there is often in his verse a mixture of the particular with the universal that seems incongruous. He dedicates his "Illustrations to Blair's *Grave*" to Queen Charlotte; but she, and he, in the dedication become like figures in one of his drawings:

> To dedicate to England's Queen
> The visions that my soul has seen,
> And, by Her kind permission, bring
> What I have borne on solemn Wing,
> From the vast regions of the Grave,
> Before Her Throne my Wings I wave;
> Bowing before my Sov'reign's feet,
> "The Grave produced these Blossoms sweet
> In mild repose from Earthly strife;
> The Blossoms of Eternal Life."

She must have been puzzled by these lines if she ever read them; and they will puzzle any reader who does not understand that Blake saw himself and the Queen as characters in the mystery-play of life.

The impulse in Blake's poetry does not come from particular events, which are mere pretexts for the expression of it; it is rather a vast and continuous *élan vital* which we feel in the rhythm even when the sense is unintelligible or absurd. This *élan vital*, this dogmatic and spiritual appetite, always beating rhythmically, does not always achieve expression. Often it seems to function blindly in phrases, lines, verses even, repeated again

and again, which find their proper context only in one poem. There are echoes of the great poem, in the Preface to "Milton," in the lines "To the Christians" in *Jerusalem*:

> And now the time returns again:
> Our souls exult, and London's towers
> Receive the Lamb of God to dwell
> In England's green and pleasant bowers;

and echoes, too, in the lines "To the Jews":

> She walks upon our meadows green;
> The Lamb of God walks by her side;
> And every English child is seen,
> Children of Jesus and His Bride.

But the echoes seem to be feeling after something which is found only in the "Milton" poem.

The greatest example of this *élan vital* is "The Everlasting Gospel"; but you cannot read it without wondering why Blake left it scribbled anyhow on blank pages of a notebook half filled with other things and on scraps of paper, some of which, Dr. Sampson tells us, are known to have been lost. With such an idea and with such noble fragmentary expressions of it, why did he not fully achieve the masterpiece which was within his grasp? There is in "The Everlasting Gospel" poetry that no one has ever surpassed, and it was his last piece of verse, containing the very essence of his doctrine; yet he was content to leave it in the rough as if he were making notes

for himself, not a poem for mankind. The explanation is, perhaps, that, having no public, no one at all who could understand him, he did write only for himself, thought in verse when he was thinking most intensely, and jotted down the verses just as they came into his mind without ever meaning to make a poem of them. What he has left us, then, is, with all its loose ends and ribaldries and obscurities, the most spontaneous piece of thinking in verse, the most naked poetry that exists; but the first five sections are all a preliminary, often wayward and inte mixed with doggerel, to the great sixth section in which his doctrine of love and forgiveness is uttered as if it were sounded on all the voices and instruments of Heaven:

Thou Angel of the Presence Divine,
That didst create this Body of Mine,
Wherefore hast thou writ these laws
And created Hell's dark jaws?
My presence I will take from thee,
A cold leper thou shalt be,
Tho' thou wast so pure and bright
That Heaven was not clean in thy sight;
Tho' thy oath turned Heaven pale,
Tho' thy covenant built Hell's jail;
Tho' thou didst all to chaos roll
With the serpent for its soul.
Still the breath Divine does move,
And the breath Divine is love.

Here the *élan vital* in the words is like a great wind bearing a flight of rejoicing birds; all

the language has come to life so that the words *are* what they signify. Though it is well, as Dr. Sampson says, to read Swinburne's commentary on the poem, you know without it that there is great matter in that music. And then, after the couplet about the breath Divine, follows another passage leading to a couplet yet more wonderful:

> Come ye forth,
> Fallen fiends of Heavenly birth
> That have forgot your ancient love
> And driven away my trembling dove.
> You shall bow before her feet;
> You shall lick the dust for meat,
> And though you cannot love, but hate,
> You shall be beggars at love's gate.

In that couplet there is all the peculiar profundity of Blake. In the past the great mystics have been the great psychologists, and Blake was always anticipating modern discoveries. He knew that hatred is a begging for love, is love impotent, disappointed, and unconscious of its real desire. But what can be stated in a psychological formula he expressed in poetry because it was to him poetry. That which science can observe and state in general terms was for him part of the mystery-play of life, in which there is a conflict of spiritual forces always renewed in each particular mind or soul, a conflict to be seen, as he would have said, only by the poetic or prophetic character and to be expressed only in terms of poetry.

Thus, when in "The Everlasting Gospel" he says Christ, he means Christ as the representative victorious spirit. For him there is no Christ of history because there is no history in the sense of something that has happened in the past. That essence of history with which he is concerned is always happening; and hence the impersonality of his poetry. For what happens to him also is but his experience of eternity. In the Prophetic Books the eternal process often becomes vague and shadowy for the reader; it can be understood only by a kind of science of Blake's mind, by comparing a passage in one Book with a passage in another. There are documents for the system of Blake which must be examined and collated as if they were not art, but facts of nature from which truth is to be discovered. But in the poems we need no science or, if we do, they are not completely poems. In them the impersonal, the eternal, expresses itself, not in mythological names or systems, but in a peculiar bright purity of sound and sense. They are as free from any human smell as mathematics, yet as full of music as a love song. No ego speaks in them—Blake's ego vented and purged itself in his doggerel—they are expressions rather of the weather of the soul; joy is like sunlight in them, tears like rain, and anger like tempest. We enter a world in which humanity becomes nature, and nature human, and all sounds have the meaning of speech.

When the voices of children are heard on the green,
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast,
And everything else is still.

There the children are like birds inhabiting the hills, and in "Night" the birds are like children and the moon a calm, universal guardian:

The sun descending in the west,
The evening star does shine;
The birds are silent in their nest,
And I must seek for mine.
The moon, like a flower,
In heaven's high bower,
With silent delight
Sits and smiles on the night.

Blake, the poet, knows that nature cannot be expressed merely as nature or in terms of things seen by the material eye:

Farewell, green fields and happy groves,
Where flocks have took delight.
Where lambs have nibbled, silent moves
The feet of angels bright.

That is not what we have seen, but it is our experience of a moonlit, empty meadow, and of the expectancy that is in all calm beauty. And then the poem passes out of nature, yet naturally, into a millennial dream of the daylight peace which this peace of moonlight seems to promise:

And there the lion's ruddy eyes
Shall flow with tears of gold,
And pitying the tender cries,
And walking round the fold,

Saying, "Wrath, by His meekness,
And, by His health, sickness
Is driven away
From our immortal day."

The human has been all emptied and purified into nature; and then the natural is all humanized again into the supernatural; and it is poetry, with its visionary authenticity of sound and sense, that compels our belief in the process.

Blake was a man imperfect like the rest of us, and his writings and drawings are full of perversity, failure, wilfulness. But the great artist is a man who can now and again free himself in his art of all imperfection and be no longer himself but Everyman. Blake knew this—it was an article of his faith; through all his long life he was attempting that freedom and, because he saw it as an end more clearly than other poets, so did he at times achieve it more completely. There are no words in our language so unalterable as his.

VII

On Blake as a Prophet

MEN have always lost their heads over prophets, and prophets have often lost their heads over themselves. The word itself expresses a common misunderstanding. The prophet is not a tipster—if he has any power of foretelling, it is only a part of his wisdom; he is a man in whom the universal man speaks, not the lower or generic or animal universal, but that higher universal to which individuals and societies sometimes attain. You may, of course, disbelieve in it altogether, in which case the prophet is to you merely one who talks nonsense; but he himself is aware of it when it speaks in him; and it makes him vehement, hasty, impatient both of his own medium of language and of all opposition or failure to understand. It is to him an absolute which forces him to utter that, true always and everywhere; but he has to express it in human language, a medium relative to human wants and human conditions. So his expression is always imperfect and cannot be understood except with the goodwill of the hearer. This goodwill he demands, not from egotism, but because he

is uttering the universal, and the refusal of it exasperates him. I have piped to you and you have not danced—is always the cry of the prophet. Argument he hates and the dialectic of Dons, because his universal is not to be proved, its convincing power is in itself. It is the truth which, like beauty, is believed when seen; and, if you will not believe it, that is because you refuse to see or hear it. You are like the deaf adder that stoppeth its ears, and you are refusing to see your own truth as well as his; you are refusing to find yourself in the universal. Who are you, says Whitman, that wanted a book to encourage you in your nonsense? Your nonsense is your private opposition to the universal, the obstacle which you set up in yourself to your own wisdom and happiness; and with this the prophet has no patience. He will make no terms with it; he will not attempt a worldly lucidity or even the contrivance of the artist. It is not he who speaks but the universal that speaks in him, often beautifully but careless even of beauty, finding what human words it can; and men must not look this gift-horse in the mouth, must not criticise him, for it is not he who speaks as an individual but—my Father that speaketh in me.

So many men, whether they stone the prophet or accept him, misunderstand him always; after they have stoned or ignored him, they worship him as a magician. In the

past he was to them one who foretold the future; now they find an equal value in all that he says and does. Any words of his have a Biblical authority, and he is the one genuine prophet, compared with whom all others are impostors. They do not know that the chief reason for believing prophets is that they all say the same thing, that this universal of theirs is a real universal, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.* When they assert that their particular prophet has a monopoly of the truth, they are depriving him of his chief authority, turning his universal into a particular; and this they do because they will not be at the pains to seek the universal in his works. It must be recognized by its own quality, and every man must recognize it for himself; but they, flinching from the effort of recognition, seek a gospel made authentic by the name of its author; the prophet has said it and it must be true.

Unfortunately the prophet himself often shares this infirmity and believes that he is always a prophet; he becomes a disciple of himself, and sets himself above criticism, not from mere egotism and conceit so much as because he too flinches from the task of discerning his own universal. The prophetic vehemence becomes a habit with him; and he despises the artist's patience and contrivance; he may even believe that he is a prophet because he himself does not clearly understand what he says; he may mistake

the automatism, which lies in wait for every one who constantly practises any art, for the universal speaking in him and imperiously snatching at language to express itself.

Now, Blake was artist as well as prophet, a great artist in two arts; but everything conspired to make him confuse the functions of artist and prophet, which indeed are easily confused. A man is helped to understand himself by the understanding of others; and Blake had no one to understand him, as artist or as prophet. His masters were in the past; his own achievements belonged to the future; he lacked that contemporary education which is best worth having. There was no one even for him to talk to, but only a few listeners who were not sure that he was sane. As artist, he was a prophet in the literal sense; he did what men were going to do as well as what they had done long ago. Naturally he believed that, as artist, he was always right, while Reynolds and the other popular ones of his own time were always wrong. He had a blood-feud with them, and was in love with his own work; he believed that the universal, which sometimes possessed him, possessed him always, because his writing and his drawing were unlike those of other men of his time. So he made a myth about himself to express his lack of criticism, namely, that his works were dictated to him by an angel, they were not his, and it was not his business to improve or judge them.

In his own time he was neglected; but now he is subject to the other kind of misunderstanding. He has disciples who are as uncritical of his works as he was, for whom he is always prophet, never artist, or rather an infallible artist because a prophet. They tell us that, if we enjoy his poems as poems or his pictures as pictures, we have not found the key to them. With the key of his symbolism we can enter a sanctuary beyond beauty in which the secrets of the universe are revealed. But they cannot tell us what these secrets are, any more than Blake could; and I would rather believe that he told us all he could by the methods proper to a writer, and that the faults of the artist are not the virtues of the prophet: that where in verse that begins beautifully he becomes incoherent, uses catchwords not to be understood except by reference to other writings and often not then, he is himself confusing the artist with the prophet and making the mistake of his disciples.

If you are in danger of believing in the magic of Blake, of treating him as our pious grandparents treated the Hebrew prophets, you may recover your senses by considering his other art; for in that the difference between his artistic failures and successes is plain. I myself believe that Blake was the greatest master of design among all modern artists, that for the shaping imagination you must go back to Tintoret to find his equal.

But, whereas in poetry he freed himself easily from all influences foreign to his own character and genius, in his other art he was free only intermittently and blindly. There are two kinds of drawing which I will call rhythmical and constructional, although, of course, there is rhythm in all good constructional drawing and some construction in all good rhythmical drawing. But the difference is one of kind, it is the difference between Cimabue and Michelangelo. Cimabue expresses himself mainly in rhythm to which the descriptive shapes of things are subordinate—it is enough if you can recognize them. Michelangelo's line itself constructs, it tells us how things are made and insists upon their functions. It is the line natural to an age eager for consecutive thought; it is, as it were, an arguing line. Now, Blake was by nature, by conviction, by habit, a rhythmical draughtsman, and all his best work is rhythmical rather than constructive; he is not arguing with us, he is telling us, in line as in words. It is enough for him if we can recognize his shapes for what they are; he expresses his real content in the sway of lines, as if it were a dance or a gesture; and he is most at his ease when his shapes are like flames blown in the wind, almost transformed by his own emotion. And yet he was not often at his ease in drawing, for all his life he was, like Fuseli, haunted by the ghost of Michelangelo, whose actual works he had never seen. Even he was subdued by

the prestige of a master whose method was poison to his genius. In poetry he could be inspired by the past art of his own country, and in his earliest poems alone does he speak for a few words, in the language of his time. "And Phœbus fired my vocal rage"; but his drawings are infested by formulæ taken second-hand from Michelangelo. It is only now and then, in the decorations to books which he printed himself, in the magnificent woodcuts for Thornton's Pastorals, in some of the Dante illustrations, that he quite frees himself from a pretence of constructional drawing. If you would excel in that, you must study the particular fact passionately, you must get your construction from the fact, not from your own mind; but Blake, like so many imitators of Michelangelo, did not study the fact; he gives us a pretence of constructional drawing in formulæ often struggling to be rhythmical and failing because they are formulæ of construction. There he is like St. Paul, who sometimes spoils matter that should be prophetic with a pretence of Greek dialectic, who makes a bad argument for the Resurrection out of an image. Even in his most famous design, the "Morning Stars of the Book of Job," the rhythm of the wings and garments is cramped by the drawing, anatomical without freshness, of the bodies. Compare this with the last drawing but one of the series, where rhythm is master of all, and you will see how Blake, even in his great maturity,

only practised his true method by accident, and when there was no association to mislead him ; the nude was a snare to him, and seldom could he find a method of his own for it. Often he was merely an inferior Fuseli ; and bits of Fuseli obtrude even in his finer works. Nothing could be more tiresome than the drawing of some of his faces, and no one could for a moment suppose that there was any prophetic infallibility in these failures ; they are as dull as late Roman sculpture or the efforts of Reynolds in the grand style.

But, if Blake is not infallible as a draughtsman, he is not infallible at all ; for he himself would sometimes claim infallibility in all his works ; by the common infirmity of prophets, when they cease to be prophetic, he assumed a status different from that of the artist, and so was induced to set down whatever came into his mind, as if an angel were dictating to him or he had command of the pencil of the Holy Ghost. But the artist and the prophet are both what they are by effort, not by status ; if they rely on status they become bores or charlatans ; and that is true of all human beings, of Blake no less than of Habakkuk. If ever he seems to have written nonsense, then we must take it to be nonsense until we find sense in it ; we must pay no heed if we are told that the seeming nonsense is symbolism.

Even in his finest poems we must not assume

a clearer purpose than we find. Take, for instance, the third verse of the "Tiger":

> And what shoulder, and what art,
> Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
> And when thy heart began to beat,
> What dread hand? and what dread feet?

We may persuade ourselves that there is some peculiar virtue in the two broken questions of the last line; but the original draft of the poem[1] proves that Blake did not at first mean them to be broken questions at all. They were continued in the next stanza:

> Could fetch it from the furnace deep
> And in thy horrid ribs dare steep
> In the well of sanguine woe, etc.

Blake seeing, what was obvious, that this did not promise well and was leading nowhere, gave it up and changed the punctuation of the preceding stanza, which had run simply—"What dread hand and what dread feet," to its present form, so as to finish off the stanza to the eye, if not to the mind.

It is a masterful way out of a difficulty, but it takes the risk that we shall ask what the dread hand and feet are there to do? The

[1] The original draft is given in the excellent Oxford edition of Blake's *Poetical Works*, published by Mr. Milford, and edited by Mr. John Sampson, at the price, in 1913, of 1s. 6d. net. In spite of the price, it is the most complete edition of the poems, and contains all the shorter Prophetic Books, including the "French Revolution," with extracts from the longer ones.

original draft tells us—to fetch the tiger's heart from the furnace deep; but in the poem as we know it we may guess for ourselves, and there is no answer. This is not the dark sublimity of the prophet, but the wilfulness of the poet, who, having hit upon a fine sounding line, prefers it to sense. (There is also another reading which may come from Blake himself —"What dread hand forged thy dread feet?" It is not "prophetic," but it does make sense.) It does not matter much, for the rhythm of the poem carries one through obscurities of detail; but the broken questions are not an added beauty or sublimity, they are merely Blake's way out of a difficulty that may beset any poet.

So I come, gradually and cautiously, to the Prophetic Books themselves, and to my contention that they too are to be judged, like the works of the Hebrew prophets, as literature, since they were written for men to read. We must make a reasonable allowance for all mystics; they try to say what is very hard to say, what they have seen as in a glass darkly. If you think them worth reading at all, you believe that they are concerned with a reality men do not perceive naturally and immediately with the senses, a reality that we are aware of, if at all, only by hints and whispers. There are no commonly accepted sense-data for this reality, upon which we can reason as we can reason about the movements of the stars. Men are most fully aware of it

when they are in an exalted state of mind—a state which expresses itself in images rather than in syllogisms. You may say, of course, that this state of mind is "purely subjective" and therefore only of artistic value; but the mystic himself denies that. He believes that he is aware of a reality not himself, though himself is a part of it; and aware of it, not by the normal use of the senses, but by a more immediate perception of the spirit. He knows it, perhaps, through sense perceptions, but by means of a faculty beyond them; he knows it with the whole of himself, that self which is not often enough of a unity to attain to this kind of knowledge. This you too must believe, or at least not refuse to believe, if you are to take him seriously; but the mystic, even if he does speak to us of an independent reality, speaks with a personal expression of his own, like the artist. Lâo-tsze has put it better than anyone: "It is the way of Heaven not to speak, but it knows how to obtain an answer." When he says Heaven, he implies an independent reality; but men make other men aware of it by the answer they give to it, and this answer is personal to them.

So a man must convince us of his experience of this Heaven, this reality not perceived by the senses, by his own expression of it, his own answer. He must say what moves us by the ordinary means of expression; he must not pretend that he has a secret to tell us

which we can understand only if we will play his game with his counters, his symbols, and allegories. If he has seen Heaven, then it knows how to obtain an answer from him, exoteric in its power if esoteric in its meaning, and leading men into its meaning by its power. The power is in the answer, if the meaning is in the Heaven he has seen, and that Heaven is to be known by its fruits.

You must, of course, read a mystic with attention; but you should be able to gather his meaning as you read; it is to be found in each sentence and in the whole of each work, not by reference to some other work; for it is the mark of a bad writer not to be able to say what he has to say in the sentence he is writing, to give us always jam yesterday, or jam to-morrow, but never jam to-day. Yet that is what the Blake-fanatics offer us in the Prophetic Books. You cannot understand this unless you know that the key to it is in that. You must grasp Blake's "system" if you are to profit by him. They are like the Gnostics for whom nothing in the Gospels meant what it seemed to mean; they alone could give you the key to Christ's inner meaning.

Master Eckhart says that the eternal birth which God the Father bore and bears unceasingly in eternity is now born in time and in human nature. "St. Augustine says this birth is always happening. But, if it happen not in me, what does it profit me? What

matters is that it shall happen in me." So what matters for the mystic, and his readers, is that the eternal truth shall happen and be expressed in him, in his actual words. We must not be told that we can find it by turning from one work to another and by piecing them all together. He must utter it sentence by sentence, and it must happen in his sentences, with pain and labour perhaps, but still here and now and in these very words.

In Blake's Prophetic Books sometimes it happens and sometimes it does not, and often Blake by his very method seems to prevent it from happening. He has the weakness of many mystics, the desire for a vast geometrical system equivalent to the reality he believes himself to be aware of. Such a system, if once a man will abandon his mind to it, can unroll itself almost automatically, like a fugue. But many fugues are empty of content; they persuade the composer that he is saying something with the mechanical inevitability of their form; and they may also persuade the hearer. It is the very mechanism that prevents him from saying anything and the hearer from seeing its emptiness. We do not yet understand that automatism of the mind which can produce form without content so easily; the automatism of improvisation in many arts, which you find in some cubist pictures, in much music, and in Prophetic Books of all ages, especially in the Bible. Blake himself speaks of it, with seem-

ing inconsistency, in his preface to *Jerusalem*: "When this verse was first dictated to me, I considered a monotonous cadence like that used by Milton and Shakespeare, and all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Riming, to be a necessary and indispensable part of verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward but as much a bondage as rime itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences and number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place." You may ask how there could be this choice and study where the verse was dictated; but Blake means, no doubt, to describe a process of writing half-conscious and half-unconscious, as a composer might choose to write a fugue and then let it write itself. We may use Sheridan's words of this method: "Easy writing makes damned hard reading"; and *Jerusalem* is not easy to read.

Yet it contains great passages and ideas, of which Messrs. Maclagan and Russell give a very clear account in their edition of it. Like all the great mystics, Blake was a foreteller of the discoveries of modern psychology; he knew the evils of "suppression"—Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires—and his story, in so far as there is one, is the story of the human mind in its effort to reach unity, not by suppression

but by "sublimation." Yet it seems to me that his ideas often lost their way in the myth which he made about them; it is like allegorical painting in which there is a conflict between the allegory and the people and things represented, and a sacrifice of one conflicting element to the other. In Blake's story you have to remember that the characters are not men and women but different parts or faculties of the human mind; this requires a kind of double attention fatal in itself to the experience of a work of art, a double attention like that sometimes demanded by symphonic poems, in which you have to remember the story while you are listening to the music. If you are writing about the faculties of the human mind it must be best, both for yourself and for your readers, to call them by their names and to see them as themselves; so will you think most clearly and so will the reader understand most easily.

The subject-matter of *Jerusalem* is really philosophy and psychology, and it is better expressed in the prose sentences of the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* than in myth. This should be read first by those who wish to understand Blake's ideas. Like Nietzsche, he went "beyond good and evil." Good according to the religious, he says, is the passive that obeys reason; evil is the active that springs from energy; but for Blake himself the conflict between this active and passive is the real evil; it is what makes men prefer

dreams to reality. By the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he means the reconciliation of reason and energy and the destruction of the delusive, dreamer's, sense of a sin which yet allures. He who desires but acts not breeds pestilence. If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise. The pride of the Peacock is the glory of God. Exuberance is beauty. Energy is eternal delight. "Those who restrain Desire," he says, "do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or Reason usurps its place and governs the unwilling." To Blake, Christ means the harmonious man in whom desire is master, and who uses reason as an instrument. From this follows his belief, which is the belief underlying all religion, that true, supreme, and harmonious desire is for reality, and that from it alone can reality be discovered. "Everything possible to be believed is an image of the truth." But, of course, belief to Blake means real belief, belief of the whole self, belief that is acted upon, not the acceptance of anything on authority. "I asked—Does a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so? He replied—All poets believe that it does, and in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything." Firm persuasion is that unity of the self which, for Blake as for all mystics, is salvation.

Blake is united to Christianity by his

mystical doctrine of forgiveness ; that is what makes him one of the great designers or creators of Christianity, those who know what Christ himself meant, in whom his passion is born anew, and to whom his theology is natural truth. This doctrine expresses itself in Blake's poetry without symbol ; we need no key to understand it, and, whenever it possesses him, it lifts him to its own height and clearness. The evil of unforgivingness, to him, is in the remembrance of sin which keeps the sin itself alive :

> To record the sin for a reproach, to let the Sun go down
> In a remembrance of the sin, is a woe and a horror,
> A brooder of an evil day, and a Sun rising in blood.
> Come then, O Lamb of God, and take away the remembrance of sin.

That is so, whether a man remembers the sin of others or his own ; and he who remembers the sin of others will remember his own. The sense of sin comes of the conflict between reason and desire ; what we have to do is to end that conflict and attain to supreme desire and firm persuasion ; thinking of the conflict only perpetuates it. The religion of Jesus was for Blake freedom from the past, and we attain to it by forgetting the sins of others ; then we can forgive, and forget, our own past selves. Hence his doctrine that Jesus, the child of desire, was born in the forgiveness of

sin; and the most beautiful passage in *Jerusalem* is the forgiveness of Mary by Joseph and her song that follows: "O Forgiveness and Pity and Compassion! If I were pure I should never have known Thee: If I were unpolluted I should never have glorified thy Holiness, or rejoiced in thy great Salvation." There is the same doctrine in the last section of the Everlasting Gospel, and it runs all through the *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience*. God Himself for Blake, as for Christ, is, by the very logic of the idea God, He who pities and forgives, He who blots out the past; the Divine energy pours itself out in pity and forgiveness, making life and growth and beauty out of sin itself, justifying even evil, since, by the forgiving and forgetting of it, it is changed into a good more subtle, more entrancing, more assured of an infinite increase than any pure good that needs no change or forgiveness.

In his expressions of this doctrine Blake rises above all our poets by reason of the richness of his mastered content. He is simpler and deeper, more passionate and more philosophic, and attains in art to that harmony which he foretells in life. When I think of it, I am in danger myself of seeing in him the one prophet, the one poet, the infallible. I am sure, at least, that he will seem greater through all the new discoveries and enlarged experience of posterity.

VIII

Percy Bysshe Shelley

MANY writers have spoken of Shelley as unique in character, but Shelleys without genius are not uncommon, especially in England. What is unique is that character, that type, with poetic genius; for it seems, in other examples, to be incompatible with poetry or with any kind of art. Indeed, some of those who knew Shelley in the flesh saw only the type in him and ignored the poet. Hazlitt, in his essay on "Paradox and Common Sense," takes him as an instance of the philosophic fanatic—"He puts everything into a metaphysical crucible to judge of it himself and exhibit it to others as a subject of interesting experiment, without first making it over to the ordeal of his common sense or trying it on his heart." Such a man, we should say, is the very opposite of the artist; and Hazlitt does not mention his poetry. Even Keats, after reading *The Cenci*, advised Shelley to curb his magnanimity, be more of an artist, and load every rift of his subject with ore. Shelley himself, in his "Defence of Poetry," writes now and then as if he were what Hazlitt thought him. "Few poets of the highest

class," he says, " have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour ; and it is doubtful whether the alloy of custom, habit, etc., be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears." We should expect a poet to know that poetry, and all art, must be concrete, that beauty does not consist in any naked truth of conception but, as Blake says, in minute particulars. The passage, we might guess, could not be written by a poet ; yet it was written by Shelley.

I have spoken of him as a type. Most of us have met Shelleys without his genius and found them irritating in their very virtues. They exhibit a consistency which they have not earned ; they seem to have been born with a set of opinions by which they judge everything and with principles which no experience can modify. They have the calm of the fanatic and his seeming readiness to listen to the voice of reason ; but we know beforehand what their verdict will be on every point. So there is something expected and monotonous in their minds, something mechanical even, and they surprise us only by their sameness. But we do not believe that their consistency is really rational. Behind this conscious life, apparently so well ordered and controlled, we suspect an unconscious life of instinct disguising itself always in formulas of reason ; only the instincts seem to be different from our own, and that is why

we fear them. The fanatic has his passions, but he is not a man of like passions with ourselves; he has appetites for strange things that do not seem proper subjects of appetite; and, even when his appetites are ours, he makes principles of them. If he falls in love with a woman, he identifies her with a cause, and causes arouse in him an almost sensual passion. Yet, to himself, whatever he does is rational; and he can always give reasons for it to which we have no answer, except our certainty that, behind all his reasons, there are causes unknown to himself, that he is dangerous because he does not know himself while convinced that he knows the nature of the universe. Such men usually have energy and courage, but no genius. They are mediocre in everything but their strangeness; their passion is arid and forbidding rather than infectious; their very weaknesses are inhuman. Above all, though they may be fanatics for art, they cannot be artists. Yet Shelley was a great poet, and in that he is unique. One other man, Julian the Apostate, was of the same type and had a most unexpected genius, but it was for war; Shelley alone is the fanatic-poet.

If we could separate him from his poetry, he would seem as absurd as his brother fanatics and even as arid. He might almost be a character in Ibsen's *Wild Duck*, doing mischief on principle; and to Hogg and Peacock he was at least half comic, the philo-

sopher unaware of his instincts, the enthusiast refuted but never convinced by facts. His very love affairs are comic even when tragic, and he never learnt from them that the sister of his soul to-day might be a brown demon to-morrow. His prose, for all its easy eloquence, seems to confirm Hazlitt's view of him. On that level he is even behind his age, a *philosophe* of the eighteenth century and before the French Revolution ; and his letters are not like those of Keats, the letters of an artist, nor are they personal, like the letters of Byron. They would not interest us very much if we did not know who had written them. But in his poetry his character interests us as much as the poetry itself, because he has made poetry with that character, because he has, so unexpectedly, been able to exhibit the beauty of his conceptions in its native truth and splendour, and has not needed to temper his planetary music for mortal ears. His theory of poetry is true about his own ; it does seem to come from another planet, another state of being. Wordsworth speaks of the light that never was on sea or land ; but Shelley pours it upon land and sea. Out of his own mind he remakes the universe and turns a dry philosophy into a myth that convinces us with its beauty.

And that is why our first feeling for him is gratitude. We give thanks to him more than to any other poet ; for always we long to believe in those Platonic ideas of which the

philosophers talk, in a reality of righteousness and truth and beauty. That is the religious desire of mankind, but it is constantly thwarted by those who profess to satisfy it. They put us out of conceit with the desired universe by their manner of describing it; for in their language it is not incredible so much as dull. The first task of the bringer of good news is to convince us that it is good; and in that they fail. But Shelley succeeds because he is the poet of Platonism, the one writer, besides Plato, who can make it beautiful. If he was a fanatic in prose, in poetry he draws back the curtain of his shrine and shows us the Holy of holies and the very object of his worship. And then we see that he is in love, not with a theory, but with a vision. The absolute becomes the Life of Life, the child of light whose limbs are burning through the vest that seems to hide them. The word is made flesh, and, like doubting Thomas, we believe at last.

Most men, when they escape from the world of use and wont into a world of ideals, become not so much absurd as arid; and that is what dispirits us. We cannot believe any theory of the universe until it has expressed itself in terms of art; for only then are we sure that the theorist believes it. It is the Parable of the Prodigal Son that persuades men to be Christians, even in theory; for in that parable there is a consistency more spontaneous and profound than the consistency of thought. It

comes from a mind that felt in Christian terms, that must have been stirred to that act of creation by something outside itself of which it was immediately aware. The parable, like all great works of art, is an answer and makes us believe in that which it answers; and so it is with the poetry of Shelley. He has expressed what before was merely theoretic, what might have been reached by a process wholly internal, so that we share his sense of an external reality corresponding to it. Mystics have expressed the union of the soul with God in images taken from the union of the sexes, meaning thereby, not to give warmth to a cold spiritual reality by likening it to the realities of the flesh, but rather to insist that spirit can outplay flesh at its own game. And so, in Shelley's poetry, that for which philosophers have cold abstract names becomes, not a woman, but far more real and living and entrancing than all women, that indeed which gives beauty to woman and to all things.

> Life of Life! thy lips enkindle
> With their love the breath between them;
> And thy smiles before they dwindle
> Make the cold air fire; then screen them
> In those looks, where whoso gazes
> Faints, entangled in their mazes.

This Life of Life is not a deduction from his thought or even from his experience; it is that which he experiences and in terms of which he values and judges all things. He

would be Hazlitt's philosophic fanatic if it were only a deduction; but since he has seen it with his spirit, he is the poet of poets, the unique lover of the absolute who makes us believe in the object of his love.

In his "Defence of Poetry," Shelley says that the poet is prophet and law-giver; but he himself, in his poetry, is the fulfilment of prophecy and the justification of the law. Philosophy, rather, is prophecy, an effort to forecast that which shall be seen by a more advanced spiritual sense; the Platonists all through the ages were foretelling their Shelley, and a race of Shelleys yet to be, for whom faith shall vanish into sight and obedience shall become love in action. Indeed, when you read his poetry, it is not only philosophy but also theology that comes to life for you. He and his view of the universe raise all the problems, especially the problem of faith and works. For no one ever believed more utterly than he did that the love of God justifies all things and will perfect even those things that seem most imperfect. His answer, if reproached for the foolish things that he did, would have been always: "I did this loving God, and it shall be forgiven me"; and that is why he has shocked those with a different theology by his lack of the sense of sin. For him the one sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, was not to be aware of the Life of Life, not to worship that. The great tragic conflict of the world was between those with a

passion for the absolute and those without it; the mystery of evil was the fact that the passion for the absolute might lead a man to break himself and others against the facts of life. In *Adonais* he calls himself a phantom among men, companionless, meaning that for them his realities are unreal. He

> Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,
> Actæon-like, and now he fled astray
> With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
> And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
> Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.

Nature's naked loveliness is an image for something which he has known, something beyond sense, yet seen through sense and entrancing with a double spell upon spirit and sense alike; and this something has unfitted him for the life of use and wont, in which it seems almost malign, like the spell of Artemis, the goddess who would not be seen by men.

That this should be so made the tragedy of life for Shelley; far more than any particular disaster, it was the source of his sadness. He could not say to himself, "Here I did wrong and suffered for it"; all that he did seemed to him the effect of his vision of naked loveliness. He was, no doubt, remembering Harriet when he called himself a love in desolation masked, a power girt round with weakness; what troubled him was not sins of his own but the nature of a universe in which love could produce desolation and power weak-

ness. Yet he *had* seen his goddess and, as Job cried—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him"—he ends his hymn with a like confession of faith:

> Lamp of Earth! where'er thou movest,
> Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
> And the souls of whom thou lovest
> Walk upon the winds with lightness.
> Till they fail, as I am failing,
> Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing!

The tragedy of this world, as Shelley saw it, is not that Jerusalem stones the prophets, but that the very nature of things is against them when they come before their time; and it is a real tragedy. The philosopher can live at ease in this world thinking about another—Plato, even, seems to have accommodated himself to life as well as most men; but Shelley had seen that other world, was haunted by hints and whispers of it always. That which is a problem abstract and almost mathematical to the thinker was practical to him; he was like an angel who has lost his way back to Heaven; and in his poetry, as in the music of Mozart, we hear the wailing, the questioning, the beating of wings in the void. It is strange that Arnold, himself a poet, should have reproached him with this. No one would reproach Mozart, for in music it is enough to sing with the voice, or move with the flight, of an angel; and Shelley comes nearer to music than any other poet, not merely in beauty of sound, but in the sense

of another world freed from the limitations of this one, vividly seen, urgently desired, yet infinitely far away. Arnold should have understood that the desire itself was all to Shelley, and to those whom his music persuades to share it. Sometimes he tries passionately to define it, passing from external images to the mind itself, to describe a state of being in which all things "no to-morrow have nor yesterday," in which there is the utmost intensity of life without its Nemesis of change :

> Could the morning shafts of purest light
> Again into the quivers of the Sun
> Be gathered—could one thought from its wild flight
> Return into the temple of the brain
> Without a change, without a stain,—
> Could aught that is, ever again
> Be what it once has ceased to be—

Experience without waste, all the sequence and certainty of beauty without its precariousness—that was his desire because he had seen it, not merely conjectured it. For him the Absolute was not a word but a world, and a wind blew from it laden with its scent. That wind we hear and breathe in his poetry.

It is a peculiarity of Shelley, the poet of the absolute, that the state of being he desires is a harmony of external and internal things. In the lines just quoted sunbeams and thoughts alike are without a change, without a stain. When the millennium comes at the end of *Prometheus Unbound*, it transforms

not only the minds of men but the whole process of life and the course of nature.

> All things had put their evil nature off :
> I cannot tell my joy, when o'er a lake
> Upon a drooping bough with nightshade twined,
> I saw two azure halcyons clinging downward
> And thinning one bright bunch of amber berries,
> With quick, long beaks.

It is an old dream of the human mind, but for him it became more urgent, more real and universal, than for any former dreamer. His apocalypse, like Christianity in the Gospel of St. John, was confirmed and enlarged by tides of Platonic thought ; all the intellectual effort of the past poured into his vision and desire, yet it remained vision and kept the primitive sharpness of desire. If he rejected old religions, it was because they were too opportunist and never universal enough for him, worn with compromise and adulterated with the circumstance of history. His own religion came to him fresh from its source ; he took it without reserve or misgiving, and in his poetry we hear it as if it were the very voice of the absolute changing words into its own music.

IX

The Problem of Wordsworth

LIKE many people, I have a grudge against Wordsworth, though I read him as much as any poet. As I read I disagree when I can and I laugh when I can, but still I read in the hope that something will happen, even in the most ridiculous poem, to justify all its absurdities. And often something does happen, even in a poem that I have read and laughed at several times before. You might think, if you did not know Wordsworth's character, that he laid booby-traps, leading you on through verses that seem innocent of all but nonsense and then bringing a sudden sublimity down on your head. At any rate, it is safest not to despise any poem of his lest afterwards you should be proved a booby. Matthew Arnold, for instance, said that the " Sailor's Mother " was a failure compared with " Lucy Gray " ; and then Swinburne pointed out, what is now obvious, that " Lucy Gray " is nothing compared with the " Sailor's Mother," which indeed is a perfect booby-trap, beginning quite dully and then rising to this :

The bird and cage they both were his:
'Twas my son's bird; and neat and trim
He kept it: many voyages
The singing bird had gone with him.

But my grudge against Wordsworth is not because of these booby-traps into which I have fallen so often, nor is it because he became dull and changed his politics. Shelley wrote his "Peter Bell the Third" about Wordsworth's dullness and lack of faith; but the best part of that poem is the verses in which he gives the reason for his real grudge; and when I read them I recognize that they also give the reason for mine:

But from the first 'twas Peter's drift
To be a kind of moral eunuch:
He touched the hem of Nature's shift,—
Felt faint,—and never dared uplift
The closest all-concealing tunic.

She laughed the while with an arch smile,
And kissed him with a sister's kiss,
And said—My best Diogenes,
I love you well—but, if you please,
Tempt not again my deepest bliss.

Leigh Hunt puts it more dully:

I was astonished the other day," [he says], "on looking in his works for the first time after a long interval, to find how deficient he was in all that may be called the musical side of a poet's nature—the genial, the animal-spirited or bird-like, the happily accordant.

In fact, there is all of Schubert left out of Wordsworth; and it is left out because in his poetry there is no sexual passion at all; it may be mentioned, but it is never expressed. I do not mean merely that he does not write love poems, but always that element is wanting. That, no doubt, is why Shelley said that it was his drift to be a kind of moral eunuch and that it was vain for him to tempt Nature's deepest bliss. For that element is an enrichment of all things, and without it art seems Manichæan, a refusal of half the reality which it is a function of art to accept and glorify. Wordsworth's refusal is much deeper than mere prudishness; for him, as Shelley implies in his little parable, there is no sex in Nature; he has cut off the sex in himself from any answer to the sex in her. The very spring in his poetry lacks voluptuousness and its music is thin; it is as if he lived in a world without sunlight.

Every one must have noticed the thinness of his music, how there is no undercurrent or groundswell in it; and the lack of it is felt the more one reads him. It is not merely a pleasure that one misses, but, again, a necessary part of reality that he ignores. All women seem to be sisters to him, like Nature herself in Shelley's verses, and we suspect that he does not love women, or men either, or indeed the universe, as much as he thinks. For this reason his very mysticism is imperfect compared with Blake's, just as his music is thinner.

Some people may admire the innocence of his verse, but the most beautiful innocence is more passionate. The innocence of Wordsworth's mind is like that of a sweet grass-eating animal; he is a kind of vegetarian and teetotaller in his very spirit; Dionysus is left out of him, and with Dionysus an essential part of divinity, as of humanity.

That, I think, is why so many have a grudge against him, though they may not know the reason. But the grudge is not fatal, for Wordsworth is never a prude. If he had thought fit to write a voluptuous poem, he would have done so with a long introduction explaining exactly why he did so. He is said to have remarked once that he could not venture upon amatory poetry because his own passions were too warm; but this explanation is so ridiculous that it must have been a false one, made to himself to conceal some weakness in his own mind from himself. It was not that his passions were warm, but that they were associated with something else in his life that was unpleasant to him and that he was not aware of the association. He had, unconsciously, suppressed all this side of himself; and we feel the want of it in his poetry, not merely in its matter but in its very technique. He speaks himself, in a line often praised, of the still, sad music of humanity; but there is another music to be heard and uttered, which he does not utter, and which is not still or sad, but rich, exultant, and

without misgiving. This music is to be heard in the very lamentations of Shelley, but not in the rejoicings of Wordsworth. Even in them we are aware of suppression or refusal; but the cause of it can only be guessed.

It is known that when in France during the Revolution he had an illegitimate daughter. He does not seem to have been ashamed of this, for he mentions her in the "Sonnet Composed on the Beach near Calais in 1802":

> Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here—

and he seems to speak of her mother as a "dear companion" in the *Prelude*. It was not his way to be ashamed of anything he had done; but the time when this child was begotten was a time of enormous hopes afterwards utterly disappointed; and it may be that all sexual love was associated in his mind with those hopes, so that afterwards he flinched from the very thought of it, as a man who has lost an eager religious faith flinches from anything connected with it. If that be so, it accounts for the fact that, while we miss the whole sexual element in his poetry and therefore have a grudge against him, he still remains a great poet for us. He himself, though maimed, was sincere; the suppression was unconscious, not the result of hypocrisy or cowardice; the defect was pathological, not moral, and it left him a poet, though one

of moonlight and water rather than of sunlight and wine.

Art may be impoverished by pathological defects, but it is not spoilt by them. Meryon and Cowper were mad in different ways, yet they were great artists; Poe was feverish, perverse, narrow, yet he wrote beautiful poetry. All of these kept the good faith of the artist, did their best and told the truth as far as they knew it; and so did Wordsworth. Anyone can see his faults, but where they are side by side with his beauties they do not soak through and poison them. Rather the beauty, when it comes, makes us forget his dullness, however long it has lasted or deep it has been. One watches for this beauty like a gleam in his own lake-country; and, when it comes, it makes all the watching worth while. You may long for the secure weather of the south, for an intellect that knows what it is about and can distinguish its own aimless maunderings from universal truth or beauty; but still you must confess that Wordsworth, if as tiresome as Nature itself, does flower and gleam like Nature, suddenly and irresistibly, though with half Nature's richness left out.

But the Wordsworthians have increased the natural prejudice against him by claiming for him just the virtues he does not possess, and by praising most those poems of his which are not Wordsworthian. They talk about his philosophy, his thought, his system even; but Wordsworth, at his best, is the most

purely impressionist of all poets, and often he spoils a poem by trying to go beyond his own impression. For instance, the "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey" are weakened throughout by this effort. The Wordsworthians praise them because they are supposed to express his nature-religion; really he dilutes an impression in them by reflections which might have occurred to a Wordsworthian, and only once does he become fully himself, in the lines:

> Let the moon
> Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
> And let the misty mountain-winds be free
> To blow against thee.

His own mind had the peculiar power of letting the moon shine on it and the misty winds blow against it, and of answering to these as if he were not a man with all kinds of preconceptions and preoccupations, but a spirit as purely open to reflection as a pool of still water. Again, there is the poem which he calls "Resolution and Independence," but which others, insisting on the poetical part of it, have called "The Leech-gatherer." That is really an impression, but he must make comments upon it which should have been left to the reader; he is not content to be Wordsworth but must become a Wordsworthian.

> Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
> That heareth not the loud winds when they call
> And moveth all together, if it move at all.

That is Wordsworth; but he becomes a Wordsworthian in the conclusion:

> And when he ended,
> I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
> In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
> "God," said I, "be my help and stay secure;
> I'll think of the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!"

Well, we can all think that, if we wish; but we cannot see or say this:

> The grass is bright with raindrops; on the moors
> The hare is running races in her mirth;
> And with her feet she from the plashy earth
> Raises a mist, that, glittering in the sun,
> Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

But even this is description, a little too careful. The best of Wordsworth is in pure impressions, like "Stepping Westward," where something has happened to his mind and he gives it to us without explaining it, gives it with the very dew upon it, as if he had picked a flower that could not fade. "Glen Almain" is another of these, perhaps the most lyrical of his poems, and one which, though not so musical as Shakespeare or Shelley, seems to make the reader hear a richer music of his own. It is a poem that satisfies the Chinese definition of poetry—when the sense stops the sound still goes on:

> It is not quiet, is not ease;
> But something deeper far than these:
> The separation that is here
> Is of the grave; and of austere
> Yet happy feelings of the dead.

That Wordsworth was not what the Wordsworthians think him is proved by his longer poems. An artist of great intellect proves it in the structure of his works. He writes a play like *King Lear* or an opera like *Don Giovanni*, or paints a coherent world like the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. But the longer poems of Wordsworth are pretexts for the setting down of his impressions with reflections between that, even when interesting, are seldom poetry. Yet the *Prelude* does pass the first test of literature, if not of poetry; it is nearly all interesting to anyone who is interested in the mind and history of man. You cannot take philosophy or morals at second-hand from it; but you can experience it as if it were something actually happening, often tiresome, rambling, incoherent, but always real. Some of it might be better in prose, but the blank verse, however blank, justifies itself because it can rise with the matter to any height. I myself, as I read, grow used to it, and it keeps me expectant of the wonders that happen in it, the peculiar wonders of Wordsworth, which seem to come out of nothing and then to fade into nothing like those gleams of his own country.

He might have made a number of his lyrics

out of the first book, *Childhood and School-time*, leaving out the duller intermediate parts, but the reader who can forget to be impatient will find, I think, even in these a cumulative power. Wordsworth said that his object was to record in verse the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them. Really he is concerned in this first book with memories of his childhood, and, as we read, we know that they are real memories; that is what binds them together and gives them their cumulative power. Further, Wordsworth is so thoroughly sincere in this enterprise that he will not pretend to be a child again as he writes. He writes as a poet, very vividly remembering his past self, though it is a poet diluted with a peculiar, solemn egotism, as if the inferior half of him must be always watching the divine part and taking notes upon it in verse, for Wordsworth thought that a poet ought to be written about in poetry.

The memories, however, are poetry again and again, and Wordsworth's own poetry:

> Yet have I stood,
> Even while mine eye hath moved o'er many a league
> Of shining water, gathering as it seemed,
> Through every hair-breadth in that field of light,
> New pleasure like a bee among the flowers.

Again and again he can:

> Almost make remotest infancy
> A visible scene, on which the sun is shining.

You may think, if you will, of Wordsworth grown up as a premature Victorian, but he had lived intensely in his childhood; and he took this part of his life seriously, at times almost living on the memories of it, believing that what had moved him so deeply was real in itself, was the future as well as the past. When he talks about Nature he means the nature he felt as a child, which for him:

> did make
> The surface of this universal earth
> With triumph and delight, with hope and fear
> Work like a sea.

The real part of the "Intimations of Immortality" is these recollections of early childhood, not the reflections upon them. You can see that he was hurt by his own loss of sensibility, by the fact that his best inspiration came from memories. He spoke of himself when he said:

> Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight,
> And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
> Heavy as frost and deep almost as life.

He lost sensibility, I believe, more than most poets, and knew it. He was constantly troubled, almost hypochondriacal, about his own state of mind. A great mass of his poetry is occupied with offering consolation to himself and to anyone else who suffers from his trouble. He represents life often as a *pis aller* with little mitigations; he writes

like a disappointed man who is resolved to be brave; and in the ninth and tenth books of the *Prelude* called "Residence in France" he tells us about his disappointment. No one, I think, has written so well about the Revolution as he writes in these two books. It happened to him like first love, as if indeed he had fallen in love with the universe and then been jilted, happened all the more passionately because he was an ignorant provincial youth:

> I stood 'mid these concussions, unconcerned,
> Tranquil almost, and careless as a flower
> Glassed in a greenhouse, or a parlour shrub
> That spreads its leaves in unmolested peace,
> While every bush and tree, the country through,
> Is shaking to the roots.

At first he fell in with "a band of military officers" (the *Prelude* is full of lines as blank as this; but, being unpretentious, they do not injure the adjacent poetry); and these were all against the Revolution. One of them he describes as well as if he were describing the weather of the Lakes:

> With the hour,
> That from the press of Paris duly brought
> Its freight of public news, the fever came,
> A punctual visitant, to shake this man,
> Disarmed his voice and fanned his yellow cheek
> Into a thousand colours; while he read,
> Or mused, his sword was haunted by his touch
> Continually, like an uneasy place
> In his own body.

But Wordsworth was proof against the reactionaries. To him the Revolution :

> Seemed nothing out of nature's certain course,
> A gift that was come rather late than soon.

He made friends with one of the officers, who was a revolutionary and a romantic, and whom he describes with the same curious power :

> He through the events
> Of that great change wandered in perfect faith,
> As through a book, an old romance, or tale
> Of Fairy, or some dream of actions wrought
> Behind the summer clouds.

Wordsworth went to Paris just after the Republic had been proclaimed, and rejoiced in it ; but he speaks of all the great events :

> Only as they were storm
> Or sunshine to my individual mind.

And that is what makes his account of them so interesting.

I do not think the *Prelude* can be read as much as it deserves to be ; if it were, the common notion of Wordsworth would be corrected by his account of himself in a highly lonely room where :

> With unextinguished taper I kept watch,
> Reading at intervals.

He watched and understood, in spite of his ignorance, with the universal imagination of a poet. There was quiet after the September

massacres, but he knew that it was only a lull :

No star
Of wildest course but treads back his own steps ;
For the spent hurricane the air provides
As fierce a successor ; the tide retreats
But to return out of its hiding place
In the great deep ; all things have second birth ;
The earthquake is not satisfied at once ;
And in this way I wrought upon myself,
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried,
To the whole city, ' Sleep no more.' The trance
Fled with the voice to which it had given birth ;
But vainly comments of a calmer mind
Promised soft peace and sweet forgetfulness.
The place, all hushed and silent as it was,
Appeared unfit for the repose of night,
Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam.

This passage, like that about the :

dream of actions wrought
Behind the summer clouds

is the very essence of Wordsworth. He was still seeing the whole world as he had seen it in childhood, with the forces of Nature so humanized that for him there was little distinction between them and human beings. Just as the surface of this universal earth worked for him with triumph and delight, with hope and fear, so Paris and the minds of men were like the clouds and the winds and the sea. He was a lake poet even there, during the Revolution ; and, seeing it all as if it were part of the changes of Nature, he had no political misgivings :

> From all doubt
> Or trepidation for the end of things
> Far was I, far as angels are from guilt.

He believed :

> That the godhead which is ours
> Can never utterly be charmed or stilled,
> That nothing hath a natural right to last
> But equity and reason ; that all else
> Meets foes irreconcilable.

Then he returned to England, and soon England was at war with France. Most men profess to be deeply moved by political events, but few are ; Wordsworth convinces us that he was. He loved England, its earth and sky and its inhabitants, all with the same natural love ; yet he took the side of France. When prayers for victory were said in a country church :

> I only, like an uninvited guest
> Whom no one owned, sat silent, shall I add,
> Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come.

Then came the Terror, and with it a worse conflict in his mind :

> Through months, through years, long after the last beat
> Of those atrocities, the hour of sleep
> To me came rarely charged with natural gifts,
> Such ghastly visions had I of despair
> And tyranny, and implements of death ;
> And innocent victims sinking under fear,
> And momentary hope, and worn out prayer,

Each in his separate cell, or penned in crowds
For sacrifice, and struggling with fond mirth
And levity in dungeons, where the dust
Was laid with tears. Then suddenly the scene
Changed, and the unbroken dream entangled
me
In long orations, which I strove to plead
Before unjust tribunals,—with a voice
Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense
Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt
In the last place of refuge—my own soul.

It is easy to pick holes in these lines and in all perhaps that I have quoted, if you read without understanding. But Wordsworth is telling of real things that happened to a real mind, his own. His power is fitful but his sincerity incessant; in his verse you can tell the poetry from the prose in a moment, and so the prose, however clumsily forced into verse, does not spoil the poetry. Read these books carefully and you will understand, I think, how his mind was wounded and how he looked backwards for rapture and in the present lived on consolation.

There is only one place where he seems to mention his love affair, remembering—

That even-tide, when under windows bright
With happy faces and with garlands hung,
And through a rainbow arch that spanned the
street,
Triumphal pomp for liberty confirmed,
I paced, a dear companion at my side,
The town of Arras.

It is irritating that he should have said no more of it than this; it must have been a great part of his life:

> When reason seemed the most to assert her rights,
> When most intent on making of herself
> A prime enchantress.

But I do not believe that he was silent from hypocrisy or fear. Rather, I conjecture, it was the tenderest part of his wound never quite healed, and that, without design, he spoke as little of it as possible. It had been his own personal revolutionary act, and, so that he might keep sane, he had torn all the revolutionary part of his mind away; he would trust no longer in the natural goodness of man or the natural kindness of the universe. Shelley, when he wrote those lines in his "Peter Bell," did not know that Wordsworth had once tempted Nature's deepest bliss, that it had not been his drift from the first to be a kind of moral eunuch, that all ecstasy, all voluptuous abandonment both of spirit and of sense were for him fatally connected with the great conflict and disappointment of his life. He had been in love, not only with one woman but with the universe, and he had been jilted; so he cut the very capacity for such love, in its completeness, out of his mind. By this conjecture I would explain both the unpoetic peculiarities of his mind and the fact that in spite of them all he remains, even at his dullest,

psychologically interesting. We feel that there is a psychological problem in his very defects, because we know that they are not produced by the desire to please readers who ought not to be pleased. The commonplace of Wordsworth is not a herd-commonplace; it is his own personal failure to solve his own problem, not only of writing but of living.

As often happens in such cases, he divided himself without knowing it. Besides the poet who remained on certain points eager, free and passionate, there was the mediocre person who refused thought, passion, discovery, and for whom verse-making was a hobby. This other Wordsworth saw Wordsworth the poet as a kind of institution never to be criticized; it acted as secretary to the poet and wrote those curious, dull notes at the head of his poems, besides, unfortunately, writing many verses of its own. No doubt, it gained upon the poet; but those who say that Wordsworth wrote nothing good in his later years cannot have read his later verse, cannot have read the "Clouds," or the "Farewell Lines to Lamb and his Sister," or the "Widow on Windermere Side." These are not written as poets write now; but not to see their excellence is to be the slave of fashion:

> So, when the rain is over, the storm laid,
> A pair of herons oft-times have I seen,
> Upon a rocky islet, side by side,
> Drying their feathers in the sun, at ease;

And so, when night with grateful gloom had
fallen,
Two glow-worms in such nearness that they
shared,
As seemed, their soft, self-satisfying light,
Each with the other on the dewy ground.

This was written, as late as 1842, about the Lambs in their Enfield cottage, but in it Wordsworth still has his old power of seeing human beings, not as narrow little individuals of one particular time and place, but like wild creatures with the whole earth and sky for their setting. These relationships which he sees between men and animals, or between men and clouds, winds and tides are not metaphors or similes but real kinships. They express his own experience of the world, which was to him wild even in the streets of London, changing, darkening and gleaming like the weather, all unaccountable yet beautiful and significant :

Like clouds that rake the mountain summits,
Or waves that own no curbing hand,
How fast has brother followed brother
From sunshine to the sunless land.

That, also written late, has often been quoted as if it were a pious ejaculation ; but in it Wordsworth really expresses his sense of death as a part of all change, a part of the wildness of life. He called this poem "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg." In that title the other Wordsworth spoke, and also in the long introduction to the poem which

relates how, noticing that Mrs. Hemans was totally ignorant of housewifery, he once, while she was under his roof, *purposely* directed her attention to household economy and told her how he had purchased scales which he intended to present to a young lady as a wedding present; pointed out their utility (for her special benefit) and said that no *ménage* ought to be without them:

> Mrs. Hemans, not in the least suspecting my drift, reported this saying, in a letter to a friend at the time, as a proof of my simplicity.

The other Wordsworth was always anxious to edify, drew lessons from the poet's impressions, and often intruded them into his poetry; here luckily they are confined to the introduction.

Wordsworth had made a gap in his life. The child, in his case, *was* father to the man; adolescence, first love and all voluptuous ecstasy were suppressed. Even when he wrote about his youth he wrote as if it were childhood, making it distant yet vivid, strange and a little cold. And as he was travelling away from childhood so, to himself, he was travelling towards it again. The past was to him also the future; sunrise he saw in a sunset to come:

> "What, you are stepping westward?" "Yea."
> 'Twould be a wildish destiny
> If we, who thus together roam
> In a strange land, and far from home,

Were in this place the guests of chance :
Yet who would stop, or fear to advance,
Though home or shelter he had none,
With such a sky to lead him on ?

He went through life like a grey pilgrim, always stepping westward, led on by the sky and with gleams from it lighting his set face. He seems to fall in with the people of his poems for a moment on his progress, and to be thinking of that even while he stops to have a word with them. He gives us impressions of them as they come and go, never as if he lived with them. In the whole volume of his poetry there is this effect of unhasting, unresting travel with casual, unexpected observations by the way. Most poetry calls us to stay and live in the moment ; it insists that eternal life is here and now in all things and all experiences ; it has an immortal and divine relish for the present and things as they are, and when it is sad it is because they change or because the mind falls away from its ecstasy in them. But Wordsworth is only resting and listening by the wayside ; in a moment he will take up his staff and proceed, and neither he nor we know where he is going to. So, being yet a poet, he is the most mysterious of all poets, maimed, imperfect, sometimes, as Shelley said, hardly a man, but a wandering spirit with strange adventures and no end to them. And in his power of telling them he is different in kind from all other poets.

X

Matthew Arnold

THE criticism of Matthew Arnold has been much praised in the past, and is still praised, with an air of patronage, by critics who seem to enjoy their own distaste for literature. But if you enjoy literature itself, you read him, perhaps, with a feeling of discomfort, as if he were forbidding most of your enjoyment. The famous saying that poetry is a criticism of life sounds forbidding; poetry is never that to those who enjoy it as poetry, nor can we believe that it is ever that to the poet. The saying does not distinguish it from other kinds of literature, does not insist upon what makes it poetry, but rather tells us to judge it by virtues not in themselves poetical. It is half-way at least to Plato's sentence of exile against the poets, or some of the most delightful of them; and we have to remember that Plato and Arnold were both poets, and then to ask why they should thus have been impelled to disown what we may think the best part of themselves.

If one could give the best of Arnold's poetry, and also that part of his criticism in

which he expresses his opinions most clearly, such as the Preface of 1853, to a reader who had never heard of him, would that reader see any relation between the poems and the criticism, between the works and the faith? He might well think "Empedocles on Etna" the best of the poems; and then he would find the Preface full of reasons why that poem, published the year before, was suppressed. But the main reason given for suppressing "Empedocles" is one that would also cause the suppression of *Hamlet*. Arnold does not deny that his poem may be an accurate representation of an interesting theme; but he says that the situation is one from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived. For it is one in which

> the suffering find sno vent in action, in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous. When they occur in actual life they are painful, not tragic; the representation of them in poetry is painful also.

There is this difference between *Hamlet* and "Empedocles," that *Hamlet* is full of incident and "Empedocles" is not; but the suffering of Hamlet does not find a vent, or

at least, a relief; the state of mental distress is prolonged, and the play ends, at last, with a sudden catastrophe, because there is no possible solution but Hamlet's death. Such situations, as Arnold says, do occur in actual life; but he dismisses them, and with them his own poem, from poetry with the statement that they are painful but not tragic. Yet he in "Empedocles," like Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, did make a poem out of such a situation, which we read with delight; and the fact that Browning read it with delight caused him to go back on his own words and republish the poem.

Arnold must have known that "Empedocles" contained many beauties, and it seems to us now that only by a self-denying perversity could he have failed to find beauty in the whole of it. Yet he condemns it with a distaste that seems to be personal; and we may suspect that it expressed a part of himself from which he wished to be free, yet had not freed himself by expressing it. Empedocles is a poet, and also a philosopher, who cannot find rest in his philosophy because it is at odds with his poetry. He tries to express his philosophy in an extended lyric; but that which he expresses is not according to his own experience, not what has happened to himself. It is something seen at a distance, the calm of an imagined past, of a golden age of simple characters; and he, in his confused present, is not simple:

Is it so small a thing
To have enjoyed the sun,
To have liv'd light in the spring,
To have lov'd, to have thought, to have done ;
To have advanced true friends, and beat down
baffling foes ;
That we must feign a bliss
Of doubtful future date,
And, while we dream on this,
Lose all our present state,
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose ?

That is what he would like to believe ; but Callicles, the young poet, seems to mock him by singing the youth of the world, and his own youth, to him :

For the Faun had been his friend.
For he taught him how to sing,
And he taught him flute-playing.
Many a morning had they gone
To the glimmering mountain-lakes,
And had torn up by the roots
The tall crested water reeds
With long plumes, and soft brown seeds,
And had carved them into flutes,
Sitting on a tabled stone
Where the shoreward ripple breaks.
And he taught him how to please
The red-snooded Phrygian girls,
Whom the summer evening sees
Flashing in the dance's whirls
Underneath the starlit trees
In the mountain villages.

Is not that one part of Arnold, the divine poet, mocking the other part ? Is not Em-

pedocles the myth of a divided personality, the inner truth about Arnold himself, which, as soon as he told it, he wished to suppress because it was indeed a conflict in himself to which he could see no solution ?

At the end the division is sharpest. Empedocles, before he plunges into the crater, asks question after question ; he loses his hold on poetry, even on verse, as Arnold so often did, and cries out in the intolerable confusion of his mind :

> And who can say :—I have been always free,
> Lived ever in the light of my own soul ?—
> I cannot ! I have lived in wrath and gloom,
> Fierce, disputatious, ever at war with man,
> Far from my own soul, far from warmth and light.
> But I have not grown easy in these bonds—
> But I have not denied what bonds these were !
> Yea, I take myself to witness,
> That I have loved no darkness,
> Sophisticated no truth,
> Nursed no delusion,
> Allow'd no fear !

No doubt the contrast between this turbid beating of wings in the void and the final song of Callicles is intended ; but it is also deeper than intention. It is the other, irreconcilable part of Arnold himself that sings :

> Not here, O Apollo !
> Are haunts meet for thee.
> But, where Helicon breaks down
> In cliff to the sea,

Where the moon-silvered inlets
Send far their light voice
Up the still vale of Thisbe,
O speed, and rejoice!

There he is the divine poet indeed, but with a music that despairs of that which it expresses, a music that he fears, even as he utters it, because it seems to endanger the unity of the self.

The contrast between Arnold as he showed himself to the world and Arnold in the best of his poetry is the sharpest, perhaps, in that age of contrasts between art and life. Swinburne put it in his own way when he called him David son of Goliath of Gath. Arnold lived a good life of duty, and, like his Empedocles, aimed at utter sincerity. Further, he armoured himself against the world with wit and a pleasant vanity; he seemed pretty content with life and with himself; but his poetry, or that part of it which rings most clearly in our minds, is all longing for a golden age of sunlight, of the Mediterranean, of the morning of the world. What we remember best of the "Scholar Gipsy" is the end, which comes as inconsequently as a dream forcing its wish-fulfilment on the sleeping mind. The process of poetry carried him unawares into that dream, into that wish-fulfilment, which was his inspiration:

O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
To where the Atlantic raves
Outside the Western Straits, and unbent sails,

There, where down cloudy cliffs, through sheets
of foam,
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come;
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

The same kind of dream, the same wish-fulfilment, is to be found in many poets, for instance, in Keats's "Ode to Maia." But Keats could surrender himself to it—it was to him poetry itself; to Arnold it was something dangerous, the siren-song that a part of him sang to the other part:

Who are they, O pensive Graces,
—For I dream'd they wore your forms—
Who on shores and sea-wash'd places
Scoop the shelves and fret the storms?
Who, when ships are that way tending,
Troop across the flushing sands,
To all reefs and narrows wending,
With blown tresses and with beckoning hands?

So Arnold himself wrote in the poem he called "The New Sirens"; not one of his best, for the conflict is felt in the tightness of its very form, in the effort to describe the lost and dangerous loveliness without yielding to it. It is like St. Antony, tempted, allured, and recalcitrant:

When your showering locks enwound you,
And your heavenly eyes shone through:
When the pine boughs yielded round you,
And your brows were starred with dew:
And immortal forms to meet you
Down the statued alleys came:
And through golden horns, to greet you,
Blew such music as a God may frame.

Still the poet in him believes that that way inspiration lies, that way the Gods are to be met; but there is something in him, in all mankind now, that inhibits this outpouring to meet the Gods. That something is, obviously and superficially, a disbelief in their existence; but, deeper than that, it is a refusal of the state of mind which expressed itself in belief, in all that we call paganism. And yet Arnold was home-sick for the time in which that state of mind was possible. It meant to him beauty and a unity of the self not so much naïve as strong and free. He never for a moment wished not to think at all, but it seemed to him that the thinking of his own time, and of himself, was sick. He called Goethe the physician of the Iron Age, and he writes of him as if the poet's function was diagnosis:

> He read each wound, each weakness clear—
> And stuck his finger on the place
> And said—Thou ailest here, and here.

And then, in the same poem, we discover the reason of his delight in Wordsworth. He is not merely the physician, but the good shepherd who leads us back into the happy valleys of the past:

> Smiles broke from us and we had ease;
> The hills were round us, and the breeze
> Went o'er the sunlit fields again;
> Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.

Our youth returned ; for there was shed
On spirits that had long been dead,
Spirits dried up and closely furl'd,
The freshness of the early world.

Wordsworth, he persuaded himself, gave him all that he needed of the Sirens' song without its danger ; the clear voice of Orpheus without his passion ; but even in this praise of Wordsworth sounds that unsatisfied desire for the early world which alone seems to give music to his own poetry.

And "The Forsaken Merman," the freest of all his poems, is still full of the early world, forsaken and seeming to reproach us for forsaking it. It is the same myth taking another form, the same longing for an impossible simplicity and youth of all things, here found in the depths of the sea :

Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
Where the winds are all asleep ;
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam ;
Where the salt weed sways in the stream.

It is a myth of two worlds, neighbouring yet separate, with rumours and whispers of each one reaching the other ; the bells and the song of Margaret are heard by the Merman, and Margaret remembers her little Mer-child and hears the Merman singing—

There dwells a loved one,
But cruel is she.
She left lonely for ever
The Kings of the sea.

There is much of Arnold's poetry, measured, outwardly calm, full of good advice, in which he tries to be another Goethe, to forget this sense of two worlds, as if he were Margaret herself spinning in the upper world of the little grey church on the shore ; and one side of him was indeed the official, the critic, the smiling man of the world ; but he too hears snatches of the Merman's song, and when he hears it he is a divine poet.

So it was not merely an old convention that made him talk of Shepherds and their pipes in Thyrsis. Like Theocritus himself, he was still longing for the early world of Sicilian shepherds ; and still he had that curious Northern home-sickness for the South which made even the country round Oxford seem an exile :

> Ah vain ! These English fields, this upland dim,
> These brambles pale with mist engarlanded,
> That lone sky-pointing tree, are not for him.
> To a boon southern country he is fled,
> And now in happier air,
> Wandering with the great Mother's train divine.

At once the verse glows and expands with the return to this enchanting theme :

> For thee the Lityerses song again
> Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth sing ;
> Sings his Sicilian fold,

His sheep, his hapless love, his blinded eyes;
And how a call celestial round him rang,
And heavenward from the fountain brink he sprang,
And all the marvel of the golden skies.

That was what Arnold longed to believe, what one-half of him did believe and so could set to music, freeing itself from the rest of him by a myth, a dream, a wish-fulfilment. But it is of himself that he speaks when he says to Thyrsis:

What though the music of thy rustic flute
Kept not for long its happy, country tone,
Lost it too soon, and learnt a stormy note
Of men contention-tost, of men who groan,
Which tasked thy pipe too sore, and tired thy throat.

For Arnold would not and could not empty his mind of half its content so that he might continue to write poetry. He was never a Romantic in the bad sense of the word—namely, an artist who will submit to the lie of the soul for the purposes of his art. And that is why the romantic part of him expresses itself with a beauty so lucid and pure. The conflict is real and the few moments of victory and delight are real, even though they are won through a myth, a dream from which he soon awakes. Arnold's music is unexpected, like a beautiful voice heard suddenly in an office or a lecture room, or like a sudden outcry of belief at an ethical meeting—so

unexpected that his reputation still remains doubtful, like a story that cannot be understood. His criticism, with its mixture of system and perverse judgments, must bewilder those who do not see the conflict of his mind in it; for the same perverse judgment which caused him to suppress "Empedocles" caused him also to condemn Shelley. Shelley was an ineffectual angel, because in him there was no conflict, and so to Arnold his life seemed unreal. He could not judge Shelley's poetry, any more than he could judge his own "Empedocles," simply by its beauty; for that beauty was still to him a Sirens' song, distant, unreal and dangerous, though it was a part of himself.

Arnold was born and bred in a home where morals were everything, and beauty nothing. His father was a great man, but of a simple nature and a strength "zealous, beneficent, firm." Of him and of the beauty of his righteousness Arnold speaks in terms of simple but hard-won beauty:

> Therefore to thee it was given
> Many to save with thyself;
> And at the end of thy day,
> O faithful shepherd, to come
> Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.

There sounds the longing for a simplicity other than that of beauty and the golden age; the images there are from the Psalms and the Gospels. It is the other stream of the past

that pours into his verse; and he was always aware of these two streams which for him ran separate, the Hebrew and the Greek. Because he stood between them, drawn now to one, now to the other, he seemed to himself a weakling compared with either the saints or the artists of the past. But he would not pretend to a harmony he had not achieved; he would not be a partisan in any conflict for the sake of an unearned power, confidence, zest. He was always on the side of the Falklands in the wars of politics or of thought. What he hated above all things was that vulgar certainty which he called philistine; what he loved was good faith. And finally he survives, as a poet, by the good faith and purity of his music. He longed to be delivered from the torment of conflict and unresolved questioning, and he reached, perhaps, his highest beauty in the words with which he describes the old, mythical deliverance of Cadmus and Harmonia:

> Therefore they did not end their days
> In sight of blood; but were rapt, far away,
> To where the west wind plays,
> And murmurs of the Adriatic come
> To those untrodden mountain lawns; and there
> Placed safely in changed forms, the Pair,
> Wholly forget their first sad life, and home,
> And all that Theban woe, and stray
> For ever through the glens, placid and dumb.

XI

The Pleasure of Reading Biographies

I HAVE read lately, and not for the first time, the English translation of the *Life of Tchaikovsky*, by his brother, Modeste Tchaikovsky. Mrs. Newmarch, the editor, tells us that in the original there are 2000 closely printed pages, containing 3000 letters and a mass of minute and almost local particulars. The translation is abridged, yet there are over 700 pages of it, and, reading it, I wish it had not been abridged. No particular is too minute or local for me, and I can read even the Press notices of concerts conducted by Tchaikovsky in Germany. I can read everything in the book, and the more I read, the more I wish to read. Further, I find myself becoming a partisan for Tchaikovsky just because the book itself is not partisan, because it is written with a proud affection that will hide nothing. Modeste Tchaikovsky, though without genius, has Tolstoy's power of telling the truth about people, and Tchaikovsky cannot help telling the truth about himself. He was not a great talker like Johnson, nor a brilliant letter writer; his reflections on most things except music are

obvious, but they delight me because they are his; and, when he does something foolish, as he often does, my affection for him is increased. "It is just like him," I say to myself, and never once does he seem to do anything that is unlike him. We are told of his indescribable charm, as often in biographies; but in this one the charm is communicated so that I can read it, even into the photographs of him. A friend speaks of his wonderful blue eyes, and I can see them, often troubled, sometimes angry, but always revealing, never concealing.

It is not because of his music that the book interests me so much; I should be absorbed in it, I think, if I had never heard a note of his music. But ever since I first read the book, I have listened to the music with a peculiar partiality. When it is not good, I am sorry as if a dear friend had done something foolish in public; when it is good, I am delighted and proud as if I had composed it myself; and when Stravinsky wrote a letter praising it with a personal warmth, I felt the same warmth. He had said with authority what I should have liked to say.

I do not think it can be difficult to write such a biography if you have that kind of affection for your subject which will not allow you to misrepresent him, and if you have full and intimate knowledge of him; yet they are not often written. Most biographers either do not know enough, or they are afraid of the

family which has commissioned them to write, or they fail to see what is interesting. Indeed, only affection and knowledge and a desire to tell the truth will teach them what is interesting. Thus Hogg knew what was interesting about Shelley and began to tell it; but then the family thought he was making a fool of the divine poet and stopped him. Yet, because we have this fragment, and Trelawny's memoirs at the other end of Shelley's short life, he has an unfair advantage over the other poets of his time, in that even his failures interest us as expressions of a character we know so well. If some one had done for Wordsworth what these two have done for Shelley, we should not think of him as a prosy old man with an unaccountable gift; we should see something of him even in "Ellen Irwin."

Most biographies provoke us to malicious curiosity by what they so obviously leave out. If you read the life of an archbishop who seems to be always an archbishop, from the cradle to the grave, and in his nightshirt no less than in his gaiters, you search for the slightest hint of some moment when he was not an archbishop, and magnify it in your own mind so that you come to believe he must have been more violently and more often not an archbishop than was really the case. The cupboard is so carefully locked that you think it must be full of skeletons; but in the *Life of Tchaikovsky* there is not even a cupboard.

We are told of all the foolish things he did, and they were many. Apart from his music he lived in a state of absence of mind and was always doing things he did not mean to do. He married a woman he did not know for reasons which he could not state, and had a nervous breakdown at the end of the honeymoon so that the doctors would not allow him ever to see his wife again. He always said it was no fault of hers, but to be in the same room with her was torture. He had one great female friend, a Madame Meck, to whom he never spoke. They corresponded incessantly, and he told her all about himself and his music in his letters. He liked this kind of friendship best, because there seemed to be no danger of disillusionment in it, and he was always in dread of that. Yet, even in this case, it came, and the friendship was ended by a complicated misunderstanding. He worshipped Tolstoy and had one divine moment when he saw Tolstoy weep during a performance of the *Andante* in his Quartet in D major; but then, when they talked together, Tolstoy said that Beethoven lacked inspiration and Tchaikovsky would see no more of him, nor would he afterwards make the acquaintance of Tourguéniev, who admired his music, lest he too should say something of the same kind.

But life was always tantalizing Tchaikovsky, and he never could discover what he wanted to do, outside his music; something drove him into doing things which, as soon as he

did them, he disliked. Thus, though a very shy man and always home-sick when he left home, so that he would weep in the train, he travelled about the world conducting his own music and wondering why he did it. Here is an entry in his diary in London: "Not a moment's peace. Perpetual agitation, dread homesickness, fatigue"; and his brother gives this description of him in Paris in 1891: "We met the next morning and he evinced no sign of pleasure, only wondered how I—who was under no obligation—could care to stay so long away from Russia. A chilling and gloomy look, his cheeks flushed with excitement, a bitter laugh upon his lips —this is how I always remember Peter Ilich during that visit to Paris."

No doubt he was a fool to go; and it may be that behind his shyness he had an itch for noisy fame which is betrayed in the fever and clamour of his music. But, all the same, he is Peter Ilich to me as to his brother. Because nothing in the Life is concealed, I never judge him, but grow fonder of him with every page I read, so that, when the cholera brings a sudden end, it is as if a child had died.

I can lose myself in a biography of this kind as in no other books except a few of the greatest masterpieces such as *Hamlet*. And I believe that *Hamlet* itself enthrals me like no other play, not so much because of the drama, as because it seems to be a biography,

that biography which Hamlet himself wished Horatio to write. I acquire with Hamlet that kind of intimacy which comes only at rare moments with real men and women, an intimacy which makes all judgment seem irrelevant and which supersedes all other pleasures and excitements of literature. But, while only the greatest writers can give us this intimacy with an imaginary character, and only Shakespeare, perhaps, has done it in a play, Modeste Tchaikovsky has done it by slow accumulation of detail in his biography; and he gives me a pleasure, less intense but lasting, so that his brother seems to have become a part of my experience.

There are other biographies that give us this intimacy, though none that I know of is quite as frank as Tchaikovsky's, except the memoirs of another musician, Miss Ethel Smyth. There is, of course, Boswell, and there are the lives of Burne-Jones, of Samuel Butler, of Father Tyrrell, and of others I do not remember at the moment; but I find myself, even in biographies that are less frank or affectionate or written with less intimate knowledge, trying to achieve this intimacy, and often succeeding, so far at least that I begin, happily, to lose my judgment about the subject of them. Thus Disraeli and Gladstone, since I have read their Lives, which are not and cannot be very intimate, are no longer opposed party-leaders to me but human beings whom I enjoy without approving or

disapproving of them. It seems to me a pity that two such men should have squabbled with each other when they might have enjoyed each other's society as I enjoy theirs. Gladstone delights me because of the contrast between his long and vast historical grandeur and a kind of innocent simplicity, as of a good little boy working hard at his lessons, which persisted to the end of his life and can be felt in the entries in his diary. And Disraeli, behind his cynical relief from the importance and dullness of politics, was not really the politician at all but the man of feeling to whom persons, and especially women, meant far more than politics or even success. It seems to me that he valued success chiefly because he could always talk to some woman about it; yet it was their minds rather than their bodies that he enjoyed. He liked them better than men because he could more easily be intimate with them; and, when once you grasp this fact, you too can become intimate with him and forgive him everything, except perhaps the letter he wrote to Queen Victoria on the death of the Prince Consort.

Further, when once you are drawn into a good biography, you find yourself becoming intimate, not only with the subject of it, but with a whole society; and so biography, no matter who the subject may be, is the best kind of history, for history itself is nothing without intimacy. Unless you can live in a

period, you know nothing about it except dates; your facts are unrelated and you have no means of judging whether they are true or false. Read the *Life of Tchaikovsky* and you know something of the history of Russian music, only scraps and fragments of it as they affect him, but still they are real scraps and fragments of the truth, not mere facts that mean nothing.

And if you read the Lives of Disraeli and Gladstone, putting enough energy into your reading to bring them to life for you, you will know something of English politics in the last century and of all politics everywhere. You will be led into the more abstract and philosophic part of history the right way, namely, by your interest in real individuals; for they are to history what character is to plot; without character plot has no meaning, without real men and women tendencies have no existence.

But this is, or may seem to be, irrelevant to my main purpose, which is to discover why I and most readers take so much delight in intimacy with people, whether real or imaginary, whom we have never met, with Hamlet or Tchaikovsky or even Pepys. It is not, I think, the desire for knowledge that gives us that delight; we are not students of human nature or psychologists storing up pieces of information to be used. The intimacy is a pleasure in itself and makes life and our very conception of the nature of the

universe more pleasant; it enriches our experience, flushing and colouring it so that we can enjoy more the society of people we do meet, especially if they too have achieved intimacy with these friends known only in books. But why is it that we find it easier to be intimate with Hamlet or Tchaikovsky than with real people? The reason is, I think, that, often unconsciously, we are afraid of each other in the flesh while at the same time we all long for intimacy. There are two sides to every actual human being, the practical side, which is concerned with living, and the other or ideal side, often hidden and suppressed by the practical, which is concerned with the kind of life we should like to live. The practical side is at the same time particular, individual and uninteresting.

My income, my state of health, in themselves concern only me; others cannot be interested in them except by an act of grace, and if they care for me for other reasons. So long as I am absorbed in these matters I cannot achieve intimacy, and, if I try to do so by talking about them, by trying to impose my concern with them on others, I am a bore. Yet even bores have a passionate desire to achieve intimacy, though they try to do it, like boa-constrictors, by absorbing others into themselves. We all have a passionate desire for intimacy, which is a great part of the life we should like to live; but most of us have not acquired the technique by which it can

be achieved, and those few who have acquired it are hindered by lack of technique in others. We are, often with reason, on our guard against each other, so that we wear a generalized disguise which makes us seem dull and ordinary. We have a way of talking to each other, as men of the world, in which we suppress or conceal our egotisms, all the practical part of ourselves, but do not succeed in expressing the other, ideal, part of ourselves. This way we adopt because we think it is expected of us, and by means of it we achieve, not intimacy, but a tepid kind of good fellowship in which we are pretty secure against open egotisms, against talk about ailments or attempts to borrow money. But it never gives us what we really desire of each other, that intimacy which is an enlargement of the self, not by the bore's method of annexation, but by a common, eager interest in things of universal import. So in our intercourse with each other we are tantalized by the very security we achieve. For the sake of it we lessen the content of ourselves—at least, that part of it we express—so that many of us cease to be aware even of any further content and become to ourselves only what we are in our social intercourse. The rest falls back into the unconscious, and the conscious or revealed part of them becomes more and more automatic, talking about cigars and golf and politics, and perhaps fornication, because these are safe subjects of intercourse in which

the real, passionate, suppressed self is never betrayed.

Yet this real self remains, though suppressed, and has still its desire for intimacy; and then, suddenly, that desire may be satisfied in a book where we meet with some one undisguised and ungeneralized, who cannot have any practical designs, nor is trying to force some standardized version of himself upon us. True, we cannot converse with him; yet, in a way, we do; for, as we read, we throw off our own disguise to ourselves and, by an act of imagination, to him. He, we feel, would understand us; we should like to talk to him about all kinds of things; almost we do talk to him. For, as he is revealed to us, so we are eager to reveal ourselves to him. Indeed, I have caught myself in long imaginary conversations with people in books, answering what they say with a freedom I seldom achieve in real life. They are friends whom I can meet whenever I like, and I need not be afraid of them; never do they overawe me into automatisms that threaten and invade my real self.

But there is more in it than even this desire for intimacy. Think of the people in books who are most real to you, whether they be imaginary like Hamlet, or historical like Tchaikovsky, and you will find that their natures have a quick, quivering, sensuous reality for you like that of lovely bodies. The spirit, when thus clearly seen, takes on

the beauty of the flesh, as it does in music; the very revelation of the self is beauty and so delight, and a beauty which, however immaterial, quickens the mind to material images. So we enjoy this revelation, however it may be achieved, as we enjoy all beauty, for its own sake and without any further purpose. But, it may be objected, all selves are not beautiful, which is true; but the selves which are not beautiful are those which cannot or will not reveal themselves. The revelation of a self is something different from mere description or portrayal of character. In books, as in real life, there are characters that convince us yet have no beauty and give us no delight of intimacy. Iago, for instance, is very well drawn as if from some one Shakespeare had met; but he repels us, not only for what he does, but for what he is, or rather for what he is not. It is part of his character to disguise itself always, and of his ugliness that no one could be intimate with him. His automatic cynicism might be a success in a club; he would talk about cigars or fornication brightly enough and would intimidate others into the same kind of talk so that all real intimacy would be scared away at his approach. But behind such genial automatism there are devastating suppressed forces at work; and men like Iago frighten us so that we try to placate them by adopting their manner, because we feel in them a vast, unintelligible darkness of the unconscious.

Iago pretends to know other men just because he does not know himself, because he is a divided self; and Shakespeare draws this divided self from the outside and only through its external manifestations. Iago's soliloquies are nonsense, mere explanations that do not explain; he could not express himself to himself in soliloquy nor could any art throw light into him, for he is the spirit in darkness, the spirit that destroys intimacy and hates love. The truth about him could be told only by science, not by art, by a psychology that would explain his mechanism and so put us on our guard against it. All that Shakespeare can do is to use him as a force in his drama, a *diabolus ex machina*; and he does give us the very pulse of the machine, which is so sinister because it wears a human disguise.

The beauty of a character that reveals itself in real life, or is revealed in fiction or biography, is, I believe, of the same kind as the beauty of a work of art; and the ugliness of a character that does not reveal itself is also of the same nature as the ugliness of bad art. Character that reveals itself is expressive; which means that the unconscious part of it is not disguised or suppressed but realized in the conscious; and the relation between the unconscious and the conscious in character is of the same nature as the relation in art between the original impulse and the final product. It is not quite true that thought has no existence until it is expressed; for, if

it were true, there would be no misexpression. Misexpression, however, is common in all the arts; and it is not only the failure of an impulse to find its proper equivalent in whatever the medium of expression may be, but also the finding of an improper equivalent in which the impulse is mistranslated and disguised. So in life also there are habitual failures and misexpressions, the unconscious always disguising itself in the conscious. We dislike such misexpressions because they offer us a self which is not the real self, is not a self at all. The final defect, both in bad art and in evil character, is a lack of unity, often concealed, as in Iago and in the simulated passion or cynicism of bad art, by a strong pretence of unity. This pretence may take us in for a time; but, as soon as we become aware of it, even if we cannot name it to ourselves, it is ugly to us. Wherever the conscious is not the equivalent of the conscious, in art or in life, the result, the outward and visible sign of the lack of equivalence, is ugliness.

And so beauty of character is the outward and visible sign of a complete equivalence between the conscious and the unconscious, of a self unified and accomplished, as beauty in art is the outward and visible sign of a complete equivalence between the original impulse and the final product. But expression is not in either case an automatic process; on the contrary, automatism is the opposite of expression, it is the conscious

subdued to the unconscious, the victory of the raw material, of the generic over the specific, the failure to achieve a self. People like Iago are really automatic; they behave like evil puppets mastered by mechanical forces below the self; and puppetry disguised as life always bores or frightens us, both in life and in art. A bad tune is like a marionette imitating the sway and dance of real melody, and Mephistopheles, in his serenade in Berlioz' *Faust*, parodies this puppetry with diabolical art; he, like Iago, would persuade us that all passion is automatism because automatism so often invades life.

So we, being ourselves often subject to automatism, are apt to be intimidated by these devil's advocates who preach what they practise, by the Iagos who, being themselves puppets, insist that there is nothing but puppetry and no possible intimacy between spirit and spirit. And we have a corresponding delight when our misgivings are swept away by an achieved intimacy, when we become aware, not of instincts working like separate mechanical forces, but of a real self in which all instincts are unified and subdued by character. This unification, this heightening of the separate and the mechanical into the human and the real, is beauty both in nature and in art. We sometimes meet people who are as expressive as music; more often they are revealed to us in drama or fiction; and then we do not ask ourselves whether

they are good or bad. They may do wrong or foolish things, but they are our friends, and more than our friends; they are part of an enlarged self into which we enter with them, a universal in which individuality is not lost but heightened.

Art is but a way of entering into this enlarged self so that the experience of one mind becomes the experience of other minds. The musician does not make those concrete events happen to us which have happened to him, but he produces in us the effects of such events upon himself, communicating, not the raw material, but the state of mind that has mastered it, so that we become, for the moment, him, as he, in the practice of his art, has become everyman, while at the same time intensifying his own character by this entry into the universal. But this universal can be entered, as Blake has insisted, only through minute particulars. There is nothing vague or generalized about it; it is not a kind of composite photograph of many characters and experiences, but the intensification of one character and its experience. The automatic, in life and in art, is always generic; there is no character in mere instinct, and the more men are subject to it the more they are alike, while at the same time they are cut off from each other and shut into the prison of not-self by the tyranny of instinct. There is neither character nor intimacy in a crowd mastered by fear or rage; though all the

members of it behave in the same way, they are a herd that will trample each other to death. And so there is neither character nor intimacy in art that is subject to instinct, in musical comedy or jingo songs or fashionable portraits. These things are like club conversation, preventing the very intimacy they profess to give; they are substitutes, like margarine; and it is possible to become so inured to them as to forget what real butter is like.

It is strange, indeed, that we can pass so much of our lives content to miss that intimacy which the real self in us so ardently desires. But the reason is, no doubt, that we achieve that real self only in intimacy and then fall back into an automatism which is not life, and which but faintly remembers our moments of life. Only so can we explain our habitual forgetfulness, that literal absence of mind in which we are content to forgo what we most value and to function like machines that are making nothing. But then comes a moment of intimacy with some other human being for that moment alive like ourselves; or we obtain it through a book or some other work of art; and then we are in another world where we no longer do one thing for the sake of another, but where we and all things are heightened in a new relation like notes in a tune, and the relation itself is everything. It is what people call an imaginary world, but it is the only real one, as we

know when we are in it; the rest of life is like waiting for a train at Clapham Junction, and a train which may never come.

Tchaikovsky was not a happy man; he knew what happiness was, yet he got it so seldom. I think the explanation of his unrest, and of his charm, was that he longed always for intimacy yet was always missing it, partly through the stupidity of others, partly through a nervousness in himself which caused him to dread the failure of intimacy, which he called disillusionment, more than he hoped to achieve it. He had longed to know Tolstoy because of the intimacy which he had experienced in *War and Peace*; but when he met Tolstoy and heard him say something foolish about Beethoven, Tolstoy himself became a puppet to him talking nonsense, and he could not fight his way through that puppetry to Tolstoy's real self. For him there was always a slip between the cup and the lip; yet, as I read his life, his baffled desire makes an intimacy between us. I see myself and everyman in that curious character revealed in so many minute particulars; and I see life as no longer an automatism of use and wont, but as something at once tragic and comic in its conscious or unconscious efforts to be fully life.

XII

William Hazlitt

MR. P. P. HOWE, in his *Life of William Hazlitt*,[1] gives us little criticism or comment of any kind. His book consists, as far as possible, of documents upon which the reader may base his own opinion of Hazlitt; and, since he has collected facts industriously and stated them concisely, it is a useful work, though he might, we think, have sifted his facts a little more. But that, as he modestly says, he leaves to other writers. It is enough for him that he has "spared no pains nor sought to evade any difficulties." His method is not to recast the narrative in his own words, but to present it, as far as possible, in those of the various witnesses, so that everything which appears in the book bears its own authority, good or less good, on its face. He has added eighteen to the forty-odd letters of Hazlitt already known, apart from those connected with the *Liber Amoris*; and they are all printed or quoted from in this work. He makes all the use he can of Hazlitt's own essays and of the *Diary of Crabb Robinson*,

[1] *The Life of William Hazlitt.* By P. P. Howe. (Martin Secker. 24s. net.)

to whom he is not as grateful as he might be. Robinson said silly things, and was sometimes unjust to Hazlitt, but, after all, he did assiduously keep his diary, to be used by Mr. Howe and others; and most of us say silly things, if we do not write them down to be quoted against us.

Mr. Howe, for all his documentary method, is always on Hazlitt's side, when he can be; and we, as we read, are also on Hazlitt's side, even against our own judgment. No man was ever more often wrong than he was; but he was wrong so frankly, and under so many provocations from circumstance and his own temperament, that we would rather have him wrong than, say, William Wilberforce right. And it is the merit of Mr. Howe's book that, by the presentment of all the facts he can discover, he works us into this state of mind about his hero. We seem to understand all and so to pardon all. Hazlitt has been called a dark spirit; but he was stormy rather than dark, with shafts of his own light piercing his own darkness, with an absence of self-deception, even when he was most irrational, which preserved him from insanity. Often he seems to be on the verge of it, but then comes a sentence of self-analysis which makes us laugh with a laughter that not only forgives but even applauds. And so it was with his friends, whom he tried so that they would have hated him if he had been anyone else. Their attitude to him, and ours, is

expressed in Lamb's answer to Southey, when Southey had implied that Hazlitt's friendship did him no good, and when in fact Hazlitt had quarrelled with him.

> Protesting against much that he has written and some things which he chooses to do; judging him by his conversation which I enjoyed so long and relished so deeply, or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes—I should belie my own conscience if I said less than that I think W.H. to be, in his natural state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy which was betwixt us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting to find, such another companion.

Friendship with Hazlitt was as precious as it was precarious, for to him a quarrel was one of the pleasures of friendship and a means by which he tested his friends. But there are phrases used by Lamb in this beautiful passage which explain why he forgave Hazlitt, and why we are ready, vicariously, to forgive him. Hazlitt was not Jekyll and Hyde: there was a power in him making for unrighteousness that was not himself; there were clouding passions behind which that self remained still bright though hidden; and that is where he differs from men whose natural self seems to be the worst part of them, and to whom we

give no credit for what they do well. We cannot add and subtract in Hazlitt's case. His sins are like gambling debts for which he is not legally responsible, and his virtues remain his own.

Why this should be we can best explain by an example. In his essay on "Paradox and Common-place" he gave a famous and hostile description of Shelley by name; and in his essay on "People with one Idea" he described Leigh Hunt, not by name, but so that those who recognized the object of the description would be amused by its malicious likeness. Thereupon Hunt wrote him an angry but not malevolent letter: "It is one thing to be dealt candidly with or rallied, and another to have the whole alleged nature of one's self and a dear friend torn out and thrown in one's face, as if we had not a common humanity with yourself." To this Hazlitt replied: "You are one of those people that I like, do what they will; there are others that I do not like, do what they may." He made no attempt to defend the attack on Shelley, saying merely: "I do not hold myself responsible to him"; and, as for Leigh Hunt, he had attacked him because Hunt had made no return for former praise of him. The letter ends with a postscript asking Hunt to write a character of him, and ending: "I want to know why everybody has such a dislike to me." You can despise Hazlitt for all this, if you will; but Hunt did not. He

replied: "I have often said I have a sort of irrepressible love for Hazlitt on account of his sympathy for mankind, his unmercenary disinterestedness, and his suffering; and I should have a still greater and more personal affection for him if he would let me." That is just what Lamb says in other words; and the phrase "irrepressible love" exactly expresses our own feeling for Hazlitt: he does all he can to make us dislike him, and fails; for, if he were not more sinned against than sinning, he endured more suffering than he caused.

This suffering was in the main caused, not by external circumstances, though they were often hard, but by the violence with which he experienced them. He could not be a poet, or a philosopher, because he never remembered either emotions or anything else in tranquillity. Memories were to him as exciting as events; to think of an enemy was like being insulted by him in the street; it meant a wave of irritation which he must instantly express, not so much from hatred as because, by expressing, he could master it. And that was why he attacked his friends also. If he happened to think of them in a fit of irritation, he thought of them in terms of that irritation and instantly expressed his thoughts so that he might be rid of them. In fact, writing with Hazlitt was not so much an art as a vent. Hence his lack of coherence and development, and the monotony of his subject matter, in

spite of the diversity of his expression. He had an unconscious practical purpose, which prevented any sustained artistic purpose; he was always casting out devils from himself; and this purging process, though practised with enormous vivacity, was art only in technique and not in subject-matter or aim. That, and not his married life, his quarrels, his poverty, or the infuriating insults of *Blackwood's Magazine*, was the real tragedy of his life: he was a great artist *manqué*. At first with a love for certain painters that was like an infatuation, he would be a painter himself; and he did acquire more skill in that art than Haydon gave him credit for, but not enough to satisfy his dreams. We may guess from his description of certain pictures, such as the "Orion" of Poussin, that they were for him not so much themselves as a starting point for his own dreams of his own pictures. He sees in them what never was in any picture, least of all in any that he could paint. He had an inward and tormenting delight in works of art, as in women, which provoked him to fantasy rather than to any art of his own.

Yet he was a born writer, with a natural command of language far greater than his command of his thoughts or purposes. This he used, like a talker rather than an artist, to relieve himself of his passions, dark or bright, just as those passions happened to him. Haydon, who might have sympathized with

him, since he too was an artist *manqué* who relieved himself in writing, has a sentence which helps us to understand him. He calls him "that singular mixture of friend and fiend, radical and critic, metaphysician, poet and painter, on whose word no one could rely; on whose heart no one could calculate." That describes his writing, if not his inner character. It is incalculable because it is all hand-to-mouth and controlled by moods rather than by thought or principles. It is not that he was an egotist—he was passionately in love with too many things to be that—but that we are always aware of the too quick and uncontrolled reactions of his ego, so that sometimes we are more distressed for him than interested in his theme. We cannot help wishing he would not give himself away so much; for his confessions, unlike those of Rousseau, are often unconscious. Rousseau, though much madder, was less at the mercy of his insanities than Hazlitt of his moods. He could escape into his art as Hazlitt could not; he could even study himself with a science of which Hazlitt was incapable; and, where Rousseau is systematic and universal, Hazlitt is reckless and particular. We may be sure that Christopher North, in *Blackwood's Magazine*, would not have insulted him so personally and basely if he had not known that the insults would infuriate. There was in Hazlitt's mind no sanctuary shut against such ugly trifles; he would remember them in the midst of his

highest eloquence, like a bull stung by a gadfly when grazing. In fact, he enjoyed rage as much as admiration, and hatred as if it were love. He had an hysterical zest for the violence of his feelings, whatever their nature; and he wasted himself in expressing them with undiscriminating power.

Hence he remained a journalist, if the greatest of all journalists, not from the love of money, nor even from the want of it, but because his inner life was more sensational than artistic or philosophic. Yet this sensationalism, being unwilled, and indeed pathological, is not ignoble; and through it, through all his quarrelling and obsessions and irrelevances, we can still see the natural nobility of his mind. When he has a real enemy to fight, an evil of substance and universal application to expose, he can write with the justice that hates the bad through love of the good. In *The Spirit of the Age* many men are attacked, but seldom unfairly or with mere malevolence. He does his worst in coupling William Wilberforce with Lord Eldon —and, indeed, he seems to dislike Wilberforce the worse of the two. But it is true that he was as reactionary in politics as the Chancellor, and with an air of righteousness peculiarly infuriating. Hazlitt's judgment of him is the same as Mr. Hammond's a century later and after a long study of forgotten facts; and it is full of observation too subtle to be all malicious. "A man," he says, "must take

his choice not only between virtue and vice, but between different virtues." The weakness of Wilberforce was that he professed all the virtues, especially those that came easiest.

> Mr. Wilberforce is far from being a hypocrite; but he is, we think, as fine a specimen of *moral equivocation* as can well be conceived. A hypocrite is one who is the very reverse of, or who despises the character he pretends to be: Mr. Wilberforce would be all that he pretends to be, and he is it in fact, as far as words, plausible theories, good inclinations and easy services go, but not in heart and soul, or so as to give up the appearance of any one of his pretensions to preserve the reality of any other.

Then there is a pretty description of his speaking:

> It is not quite *parliamentary*; it is halfway between that and *evangelical*. He is altogether a *double-entendre*: the very tone of his voice is a *double-entendre*. It winds and undulates, and glides up and down on texts of Scripture and scraps from Paley, and trite sophistry, and pathetic appeals to his hearers in a faltering, inprogressive, sidelong way. . . .

I quote this passage to illustrate Hazlitt's style as well as his more delicate manner of attack. It is a conversational style, and to read it is like hearing him speak. But his peculiar virtue is that he can not only make it more precise and more vivid than talk, but

also can sustain it with an eloquence that remains conversational even as it towers through paragraph after paragraph to heights of exultant virtuosity. The best instance of this is his essay on Coleridge in *The Spirit of the Age*. Relations between Coleridge and Hazlitt were always uneasy, but what Hazlitt says of him in print might have been said by Lamb in a letter. The difference was that Lamb distinguished between public and private utterances, while Hazlitt did not, except that he usually spoke worse of a man in public than in private. Still the essay is full of the wonder and almost awe which Coleridge inspired in his friends ; and in the middle of it is a kind of Odyssey of the adventures of the poet's mind which, for sustained rise, diversity, climax and fall, no writer has surpassed. You can read it aloud as if it were a stream of transfigured talk ; never for a moment does it become weak or pompous ; and the most inspired passages issue naturally out of those that are nearest to common speech. Here is an instance of this sudden yet easy rise :

> [Coleridge] dwelt for a while in the spirit with John Huss and Jerome of Prague and Socinus and old John Zisca, and ran through Neal's History of the Puritans and Calamy's Nonconformists' Memorial, having like thoughts and passions with them. But then Spinoza became his God, and he took up the vastc hain of being in his hand, and the round

> world became the centre and the soul of all things in some shadowy sense, forlorn of meaning, and around him he beheld the living traces and the sky-pointing proportions of the mighty Pan ; but poetry redeemed him from this spectral philosophy, and he bathed his heart in beauty, and gazed at the golden light of heaven, and drank of the spirit of the universe, and wandered at eve by fairy-stream or fountain . . .

and so it continues, as if Hazlitt were conducting an orchestra of words and had only to wave his wand to make them play for ever. But he knows when to stop and how to manage his cadenza :

> Alas ! "Frailty, thy name is Genius!"—What is become of all this mighty heap of hope, of thought, of learning and humanity ? It has ended in swallowing doses of oblivion and in writing paragraphs in the *Courier*.

Of course Hazlitt ought not to have written thus of a friend, or half-friend, still living. But a writer will ask—Could he help it, when he had such things to say ? The theme of Coleridge inspired him, and he could not have treated it except as he did, with the contrast between promise and performance underlying the whole rhapsody and at the end suddenly proclaimed. Yet even here, with Hazlitt at his height, we still wonder why there was not greater matter for that style. No man was ever less tongue-tied ; but he was spirit-tied,

and his very facility of language is often a sign that his energy is cut off from the depths of his mind. Often it is like the dangerous, blind force of a gun broken loose from its carriage and rolling about the decks of a ship in a storm at sea. This danger was felt by his friends more than by his enemies: every one knew what he would say of Eldon or Gifford, but no one knew what he would say of Leigh Hunt or Coleridge or Shelley, men of like principles with his own. At any moment he might remember some little thing against them and pour all his power of expression into it, changing instantly from nobility to malevolence.

This irresponsibility is, to some extent, concealed by his style. As Lamb is more consistent in matter than in manner, disguising the constancy of his mind in the play of his language, so Hazlitt is more consistent in manner than in matter, using words with a traditional majesty even when he is saying any mischief that comes into his head. That, no doubt, is why he is less read than he deserves; he had his eloquence too much at command, and could apply it to any theme. Reading him is like looking at a series of pictures by Rubens which are all so energetic and so masterly in manner that we cannot tell which he painted only for the sake of painting. As we say, "Oh! Rubens," and pass on, so we say, "Oh! Hazlitt," and turn to some other writer whose good we can tell more

instantly from his bad. He, like Rubens, is most admired by those who practise his own art; he is a writers' writer as Rubens is a painters' painter, for a writer knows by experience that all this precision and sustained energy are not automatic, that there is successful effort in every paragraph. Perhaps the world would be more interested in Hazlitt if it were aware of the psychological problem that lies behind his mastery of words so inconsistent with his failure to master himself. He was a great lover who could not live with any woman, a great writer who said things different from what he had to say. With all his power of expression, he incessantly misexpressed himself; yet his greatness was felt even by his misused friends, and we feel it even in his misused eloquence.

XIII

Mr. George Moore

MR. MOORE is a writer who interests us in his writings, yet beyond them, as if each of his books were but an event in the psychological romance of his life. Mr. John Freeman has felt this interest so strongly that he has written a clever yet patient book called *A Portrait of George Moore*, in which Mr. Moore, as a human being, is deduced from his writings. He begins by saying that of all confessed egoists among English writers none has written more fully or more deceivingly about himself than George Moore; and if he used the word egoist as Meredith uses it, we should begin by disagreeing with him. For Mr. Moore's concern with himself helps him to write well, but egoism would hinder him. The egoist is a bore because his interest in himself is unconscious and disguised; while he seems to talk about other things, he himself is always the underlying subject. But Mr. Moore talks about himself to illustrate other things; he is interested in himself as a part, and to him the best-known part, of the universe. His literary history is not a private concern forced upon the public,

as some men force their health or their grievances upon us, and there is no close, personal smell in his talk about it. We are not provoked to say: There is too much Moore in his writings, for, when he talks of himself, he seems to be talking of Everyman and to choose himself only as an instance. In that he is like, as in most other things he is unlike, Samuel Butler, who had the same eager yet philosophic interest in all that happened to him, and whose *Way of All Flesh* is a patchwork of actual experiences.

But Mr. Moore was a long time learning to pour his experience into his books. Like Butler, he tried to be a painter, but he also tried to be a realist in the impersonal French manner; and in that he was as misguided as Montaigne would have been if he had tried to think and write like Aristotle. Mr. Moore seems to have been long overawed by French literature because of the excellence of French painting, and to have supposed that Flaubert had discovered the final, scientific way in which stories ought to be written. But there is no scientific way of writing stories, and Flaubert's method is unsuited to Mr. Moore. Flaubert makes little use of his memories, seeming to relish them no more than he relishes anything else; but Mr. Moore lives upon his memories, and did not find himself as a writer until he learnt how to use them. Flaubert's impersonal manner hides from himself a mass of unconscious malice against

those who can enjoy life, but Mr. Moore enjoys life as much as anyone; he enjoys even his malice, which is all conscious and relished as much as his affections. He has said that it is his *petit luxe* to be ridiculous; but Flaubert would have died rather than be ridiculous. Art was to him an elaborate means of shutting immediate experience out of his work, so that nothing about himself might be betrayed; but Mr. Moore's art is all confidence and the world is his confessor. If an English artist with a genius for illustration resolved to paint like Claude Monet, he would not be more misguided than Mr. Moore was in his efforts to be a realist; and for many years these efforts hid him from himself and from the world, though it may be that the discipline of self-abnegation profited him in the end.

He seems now to have lost his superstitious reverence for Flaubert, and even for Balzac; at any rate he has escaped from their influence. He writes as if for an audience of friends, not of faintly amused and scornful immortals; and he has told us that he does not care for *Evelyn Innes*, the last of his books in which we are aware of a resistance to his proper bent, of an attempt to write as if he were not himself, but the nature of things recording itself. Mr. Freeman thinks that *Evelyn Innes* is a failure because it expresses a "strange fondness for the corrupt and wanton"; that there is a "strain of wantonness in Mr. Moore's intellectuality that responds only too

punctually to the stimulus of his subject"; but it seems to us rather that he has failed to respond to the stimulus of his subject, indeed to discover, until too late, what his real subject is. The book becomes interesting when at last it deals with Evelyn's religion. Then we are aware of a real author, and not an abstract figment, writing about a real person. Mr. Moore's art is to make us feel that his characters are people whom he himself has known outside his stories; his peculiar gift is to turn reminiscences into works of art while still keeping the intimacy, the casualness, of reminiscence. Even *The Brook Kerith* has this quality; it seems to be all remembered, like the Gospels themselves; and he has written a preface to the fifth edition which is full of reminiscence. In it he relates how his father used to tell stories to his visitors of the years he had spent in Syria, and so "Syria and stories became part and parcel of me at a very early age." So, too, he has thrown the enchantment of memory—how, we cannot tell—over that story so remote yet so familiar. We are not concerned to argue whether or no he ought to have done it; these *oughts* do not belong to literature; and no doubt when the subject, asleep, as he tells us, in his mind for more than half a century, suddenly awoke, he could not think of *oughts*. "What a wonderful subject," he cried, and stood amazed at it. He had to tell that story because his mind had conceived

it; and he has told it so that no one can doubt his artistic good faith, or suspect him of aiming at a scandalous success. "My memory of the writing of that book is a wild chase after a story beckoning me always, and a multitude of moving incidents, every one falling into its place, or seeming to do so, my intervention in the adjustment being of the very slightest." The process must have been like memory; and we may guess that Mr. Moore has so much the habit of remembering that his mind seems to do that while it imagines, giving the fondness and abundance of memory even to a story so strange and far away. In this preface, too, he gives us a new end to the book, which, he thinks, must have been the end of Paul; how he was not martyred in Rome, for that was but an end imagined by the people who needed a climax, but how, since he could not cease travelling, he heard a voice that called him to Spain. There, in the valley of the Guadalquivir, which Mr. Moore seems to remember as if he himself had been Paul and had visited it in his old age, Paul died in the presence of a shepherd boy, who buried him in a cavity of the rocks, "which done, he follows his flock, understanding nothing, but conscious that something great and noble has passed out of the world."

It is strange how, in this preface, Mr. Moore seems to have been remembering St. Paul yet longer than when he wrote the book,

and how Paul seems to be more tenderly treated by that lengthening memory; but *The Brook Kerith* is all a memory of Christianity as something that belongs to a universal childhood, something which manhood must regard differently, yet not with disbelief. For we do not outgrow the experience of childhood, we do not even look back on it: it remains part of us and changes with us, connecting our present with our past and making us feel that we are both changing and eternal. So in *The Brook Kerith* there is neither satire nor blasphemy—that you can tell from the very style—but rather a faith in memory, whether of the individual or of mankind, as containing truth through all its illusions, as being fact personalized by the minds it has travelled through, and therefore fact with more reality in it than things once seen and accurately recorded so that they may not be forgotten.

For Mr. Moore, memory is indeed the best critic, artist, and philosopher in one, telling him automatically what should be recorded, because it *is* recorded in his mind. And here again we see the difference between him and an egotist; for he lets memory act with its own unconscious rightness, and is impartial in his welcome of what it gives. No more than Boswell himself does he suppress memories lest they make him ridiculous. Rather what is remembered is sacred because it is remembered, because, without effort of

his, it has become part of himself, as experience becomes music in the mind of a composer. It is, indeed, his religion to listen to his memories as it was Mozart's religion to listen to the melodies that sounded in his mind—a purely artistic religion, no doubt, but one that has a Christian gentleness and impartiality in it.

This gentleness, this impartiality, make the success of his latest book. The common theme of all the different stories published under the title *In Single Strictness* (Heinemann) is celibacy, not accidental or chosen on principle, but rather as a natural state of mind. A number of celibates are chosen whose temperaments, Mr. Moore says, are so closely related that he looks upon the book as a single narrative divided into five chapters. The theme might be treated with a pretence of science, or with satire, or with prurience; it might be treated in many tiresome ways, but Mr. Moore has avoided them all, because he has a curiosity about the diversities of life which includes affection. To him these diversities are delightful just because so often one can find no survival value in them. Barren people, biologically, are failures; but how unreal is biology when one thinks of real people; how unreal are all business tests. And that is the delight of reality; it is unbusinesslike, wasteful, until you regard it from the point of view of the affections; but only then does it become reality to you.

There could not be a more complete instance of waste than Wilfrid Holmes, the first of Mr. Moore's celibates, who can no more earn his living than he can marry, who can do nothing so as to produce any effect on other people, who makes up and plays little tunes in a London lodging, and lives upon a little allowance from an aunt. But Mr. Moore sees Wilfrid as his mother saw him, does not apply the test of use to him, tells us about him as if he remembered him with fondness, so that we are convinced he has known a real Wilfrid, no doubt in different circumstances, and has here placed him in his right setting, cultivated him, as it were, so as to make him flower in his own delicate, forlorn way. There is no need to ask why Wilfrid does not marry; he is altogether too inconclusive to fall in love with any particular person; nothing so complete or practical as love could ever happen to him. Ninety-nine hundredths of his life is passivity; and the only active part of it is the making of his little tunes, with which he can do nothing except play them on his piccolo, "that diminutive instrument hardly larger than a toothbrush," when his flute is in pawn. And yet (as Mr. Moore says) "he has come out of the mould that Nature reserves for some great purpose known only to herself, mayhap the preservation of pity and compassion in the world." But, in giving even that reason, he seems to be false to his own implied philosophy; for he proves

by his story that in Wilfrid there is a beauty which does not need to be justified ; and our compassion is but an answer to that beauty, which is there, like the pattern on a butterfly's wing, because it is beautiful ; and no one can say why it is beautiful. It is enough that an artist should make us aware of it, and so enrich our sense of reality.

Priscilla and Emily Lofft is another complete success, as it seems to us, of memory. They are two sisters who live for each other, withdrawn, like Wilfrid, from life into little intensities of their own. Emily once came near to marriage ; but the young man found she had not enough money, and would not allow Priscilla to live with them after marriage ; so the engagement was broken off. Priscilla dies of consumption, troubled by a secret withheld from her sister, which is only that she had read an erotic French novel. That is all ; but Mr. Moore tells it so that this little scruple becomes the symptom of a great passion, and of the pathos of two women, knowing nothing of the world, but loving each other with an unsexual sweetness such as we hear in some childish and unearthly music.

Hugh Montfert, the longest story of the book, reads more like a memory than any of them ; but it does not succeed like the others, because in it Mr. Moore seems to be explaining by a theory what has puzzled him in a real person. Hugh, a character like Wilfrid, though less weak and harmless, marries the

sister of his friend, and then finds that his love is not for her but for the friend. He is the most innocent of creatures, and dismayed at the perversity he suddenly discovers in himself. But the theme remains for Mr. Moore a theory, even while he makes a story of it. Hugh is real enough so long as he seems to be drawn from memory; but there is a kind of incongruous science in the explanation of his behaviour as a bridegroom which convinces scientifically perhaps, but not æsthetically. As for the friend, he is very well done, a memory perhaps of Oliver Madox Brown; but the whole plot is distorted between curiosity and explanation, as if it were a detective story with a solution that does not satisfy our expectations.

Nor is there complete success in *Henrietta Marr*, the one unpleasant person among all these celibates; for Mr. Moore here changes his method in the middle of the story. He begins by drawing her as if from inside and then, despairing of intimacy, draws her from the outside, returning almost to the old impersonal method that suits him so ill. It seems to us, indeed, that he has met a Henrietta Marr and remained puzzled by her, and has communicated only his bewilderment to us. She is a philistine who in cold curiosity desires to be an artist, and a prude who also in cold curiosity desires to be a wanton; but, behind all her curiosities, she is an egotist, desiring nothing finally except to be always the

centre of the picture, yet with no means beyond some good looks of achieving that. Her secret is, perhaps, that she is not satisfied with a physical triumph, and that she has a coldness which prevents her from paying the price of that triumph; she is always trying to get something for nothing. In any case, she remains a puzzle for us as for Mr. Moore; and we cannot read the story without asking, all through it and at the end, Why? why?, so that it is a problem rather than a story, failing in that sympathy which is Mr. Moore's great gift. But the last story of all is a masterpiece because it is all sympathy, expressed not merely in words, but in the very contrivance of the plot. Here also there is a problem in the behaviour of Sarah Gwynn; but the explanation, when it comes, triumphantly solves it and surpasses expectation in the beauty of its solution. We start by liking Susan, but we fear that the explanation of her mystery may make us like her less; and then it makes us like her more. She, like Emily Lofft, lives in a little intensity of her own, too deep to be disturbed by any sexual love.

And that, finally, is the secret of Mr. Moore's celibates, all except Henrietta Marr, who alone is a celibate from defect rather than excess of affection. For even Wilfrid Holmes has found in his tunes a love from which nothing can distract him, refusing by instinct to mix that love with any kind of coarser utility. In fact,

the book has all through an implied philosophy—the philosophy of the artist, that the beauty of life is not to be explained in terms of any utility, even biological. Just as absolute music is a withdrawal of art from all practical passions, giving us the expression of love without an object, so in these stories Mr. Moore withdraws his art from the embraces of the tender passion, proving that they are not necessary to kindle it. And in his art also he proves that the later life of memory need not be parasitic on the past or a *pis aller* of old age. It is a real life of emotions more tranquil but richer, one in which what has happened lives still in what is happening. He is not merely a looker-on who sees most of the game, but is playing a game of his own, like Wilfrid with his lonely flute. For it is through memory that he has achieved style, found a way of writing perfectly fitted to his conceptions. His style has a wavering certainty like that of memory itself. You cannot tell why these particular things should be said, or said thus; but, as you read, they gather round you like your own thoughts, and every statement is personalized for you as if it had been born in your own mind and uttered by your own internal voices. There are some who detest Mr. Moore's later writing because they resent this intrusion of a personality not their own, as if some alien and malign spirit were stealing into them with a kind of black magic and causing them to become

other than themselves. With them we cannot argue, for the magic does not seem to us to be black, but the white magic of art. And, like Mr. Moore himself, we are interested in the process by which he has achieved this unexpected mastery after long and often misguided efforts.

How is it that he has reached this tender seriousness through so many trivialities, and escaped from those hard taskmasters the passions into this tranquillity of art, half Olympian, half Christian? The answer seems to be that he has been led, always and however deviously, by a religion of complete artistic disinterestedness. Many youths have a wish to write well for their own glory, but he wished to write well, as the theologians would say, for the glory of God. From the first art must have meant to him not something that might make him famous, but a means of achieving, by expression, a sense of reality; it was always reality, and not himself, that filled him with wonder. You see him in his own confessions the admirer of particular persons, sometimes ill-chosen, and often absurdly subject to their influence. But gradually these individuals sink for him into a universality of interest; and it is all reality that he begins to admire, not in special artists or charlatans, but in the whole human process. This has remained for him an æsthetic rather than a moral religion, but it has brought richness and justice into his

observation and like qualities into his style. As you read his later books he seems to have achieved something remarkable, not only in them, but in himself; to have acquired, by the disinterested practice of his art, an attitude of peculiar and surprising rightness to life itself. As the painter by painting learns to see colour where others see only dull neutrality, so he by writing has learned to see delicacies of character where most of us would find only futilities to be despised. And these delicacies are re-created in the very quality of his writing as a painter re-creates colour in the quality of his paint. Most of us cannot see such things because we cannot express them, but he has learnt to see them by the effort to express them. Every artist makes, not merely works of art, but himself by the practice of his art; and Mr. Moore, by a long and religious disinterestedness, has made a character which we feel in every turn of his phrases.

XIV

Back to Methuselah

THROUGH all religions, whether born or made, there run certain patterns of the human mind; in the very reaction from one pattern there runs another. You can see these persistent patterns in the heresies which Gibbon enumerated; and you can see them reappearing in the "fancy," not yet realized or practised, religions of Mr. Wells and Mr. Shaw. They are both a little contemptuous of the classical forms of religion, its classical moulds and phrases; the experience of centuries is nothing to them; they will start afresh free from the superstitions of the past, and they do start cheerfully and confidently into a series of heresies long ago detected and docketed. With these they cannot be content; like the modern embryo and infant, they pass rapidly and easily through phases that in the past were long and painful; and still they seem unconscious of the process, though no doubt at the end, if they reach it and attain to a classical orthodoxy, enriched with new experience, they will see what has been happening to them.

Mr. Shaw in this book, both in his preface

and in the different parts of his play, which will merely irritate and puzzle those who read it as a play, is the natural man thinking about the nature of the universe. He is not yet "in a state of grace," and so his thought falls into patterns fierce and natural, like the patterns of a tiger's skin or the convolutions of a shell. But to those who are interested in such things it must be intensely interesting; for it is real thought, although without freedom, a kind of physical growth and proliferation which must fall into patterns because it has attained to no communication with anything outside and above itself, and so is not creative. The paradox of it all is that it is thought about religion, and about the creative faculty. At present Mr. Shaw remains a heretic because he mistakes this natural, conditioned and unfree thought about religion for religion itself. In the vague and common phrase, he "sees the need for religion," and states it magnificently in his preface. Like Samuel Butler, he cannot away with that theory of evolution which abolishes mind from the universe; and for this he would substitute something which he calls creative evolution, by which he means a purpose fulfilling itself, not by any mechanical process, but by the exercise of will. He sees that a mechanical process, the mere moulding of life by the pressure of external circumstances, can express only an external will—if any will at all, a will with which we have nothing to do

and of which we cannot even be conscious; in fact, that Neo-Darwinianism, as he calls it, is a doctrine of mere transcendence, like the old Hebrew belief in Yahveh; and from this he turns with loathing to a doctrine of the immanent will which man can express and realize more and more as he attains to consciousness. In the first part of his *Pentateuch*, called "In the Beginning," the serpent makes Adam and Eve conscious of this immanent will, as he has made their mother Lilith conscious of it, and so induces it to work in them. Lilith had willed to bear two children, male and female; that was her share in creative evolution: Adam and Eve will both to perform the functions of sex and to put off a personal immortality, which appals them, so that they may lose themselves in their children. This part of the *Pentateuch*, by the by, is delightful and beautiful; Mr. Shaw has a Platonic power of myth-making which he exercises too seldom, and here he justifies the past ways of evolution in man.

It is when he comes to foretell its future ways that his religion betrays its inadequacy, because it is thought about religion and not religion itself. For the effort of religion is twofold: it is to present both the truth and a truth that is good enough, to charge the truth with human feeling and values, so that it shall be at once convincing and adorable; and this is a task so difficult that it has hitherto been achieved only in glimpses by works of art such

as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Mr. Shaw, having stated his thesis of creative evolution and the omnipotence and supreme reality of the will, is at a loss for something worth willing, for something good enough; he cannot charge his truth, if truth it be, with human values and feelings. Thus, when he comes to state in concrete terms the achievement of the omnipotent will in the future, it amounts to this: that human beings will succeed in living much longer than they live now. In the second part of his *Pentateuch*, "The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas," which happens to-day, he presents the thesis that men fail now of civilization because they do not live long enough; and this is combined with satire, some of it good and some rather dull. Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George are introduced, or, rather, caricatures of them, marionettes which jerk convulsively and amuse only because they are obviously marionettes; and there is one of Mr. Shaw's young super-women for whom we find it hard to forgive him, since, while they are not drawn from life, they are industriously imitated by actual young women, who thus become more tiresome even than they were born. In the next part, laid in the year 2170, "The Thing Happens": there are a few people already living far past threescore years and ten, but already we begin to wonder what good they are getting from it; and in the next, "The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman," A.D. 3000,

where we are introduced to a whole race of long-lived beings, we find that they *are* getting no good from it that is not expressed in negative terms. Positively they appear to be priggish, dull and implacable, and the more so the older they become. Then in the last part, "As far as Thought can Reach," which happens in the year 31,920, we wish ouselves back in the year 1921 even. That is the defect of all Utopias; nobody ever seems to have anything to do in them, except in the Utopia of Mr. Hudson's wonderful *Crystal Age*, which turns out to have a tragedy hidden at its heart. Mr. Shaw's Utopia, in which every one lived to the age of Methuselah and dies at last by accident, is a kind of composite photograph of all the more serious religious heresies, dominated by the supreme intellectual heresy that the Divine life consists of contemplation. Original Christianity attempted to free the human mind from it by an affirmation of the positive goodness of God; but this affirmation was too daring and difficult to control thought, or conduct; the schoolmen fell back into the intellectual heresy, and Mr. Shaw rushes into it as if it had never been before. His almost immortal beings, born out of eggs and born more advanced than adults now, have four years of natural, instinctive life, life full of content, such as love and art; they then appear to pass into a life of will, in which they can do nothing better with their wills than grow

extra heads and arms; and, finally, they pass into the life of mystical contemplation, in which they become less and less aware of external reality and are freed from all the sorrows and joys which the stimulus of external reality provokes.

All this, to those who are interested in heresies, will be very interesting; the old patterns reappear in this fierce, natural thought; and once again we have a religion which is not good enough because it is the expression of a nausea for actual things, of a mere desire for release—because, in fact, it is Manichæan. Mr. Shaw, in his thought here, is very like a cubist in art. For, as the cubist tries to make an abstract art out of an energetic disgust of actual things and the commonplace he sees in them, the seeing of which is precisely his failure as an artist, so Mr. Shaw tries to make an abstract life out of his disgust of actual things and the commonplace he finds in them, which is precisely his religious failure. He falls even into the old Platonic heresy about art, that it is a making of toys and dolls, imitations of reality less real even than human beings. In fact, he judges it and all things practically; and because he does so, because he has no sense of the absolute in art or in morals, he is thrown back for his absolute upon an empty intellectual process which consists in the contemplation of nothing, since nothing is worth contemplating. For him the word is never made flesh, but becomes the

word only as it empties itself of content. His sculptor passes from the making of dolls to the study of mathematics, as if the intellectual activity were a higher form of the æsthetic, instead of something quite different which can be supplied with content only by the æsthetic. His Lilith, who appears at the end to speak the ultimate truth, confesses herself a Manichee :

> I brought Life into the whirlpool of force, and compelled my enemy, Matter, to obey a living soul. But in enslaving Life's enemy I made him Life's master ; for that is the end of all slavery ; and now I shall see the slave set free and the enemy reconciled, the whirlpool become all life and no matter.

Yes ! But the whirlpool, as Mr. Shaw conceives it, remains a whirlpool, becomes, indeed, more and more of one, just because it whirls so fast that it makes an end of matter ; and that is his Manichæan idea of reconciliation. But it will not satisfy because it is contrary to the deepest human desire—namely, for a more and more complete differentiation in fellowship. It is significant that Mr. Shaw's ancients, his heirs of all the ages who have accomplished the task of creative evolution and live as long as Methuselah, live more and more alone. What fellowship there is in his remote dreamed-of future is only in the years of childhood, and is made by the sexual instinct. After that his paragons take a disgust of love and of art, and go off, first to will, and then to think, alone. It is not to be

wondered at that they lose character and that nothing more can be said about them except that they are just thinking, within themselves.

This barren climax has come to religious thought again and again, so long as it has been thought about religion mistaking itself for religion. Such thought always ends in a mystical pessimism because by itself it is unable even to conceive of anything worth desiring; and the task of religion is to conceive of something worth desiring which also can be achieved. Its task, in fact, is not elimination, but sublimation—not merely the imagining, but the achievement, of a relation in which all things shall gain their identity rather than lose it, like notes in a tune. Mr. Shaw aims at a tune in which there are no notes, in reaction against the natural man who sees only notes and no tune. That is always the result of a religion of pure immanence; it seeks and seeks for the Divine in man, and finds it only by the elimination of all human qualities; while the religion of pure transcendence seeks and seeks for the Divine in God, and finds it also by the elimination of all human qualities. Both end in emptiness; they are barren because they deny the mystical union of the immanent and transcendent, which is the true creative evolution. Mr. Shaw, denying this union still in spite of his vast desire for it, remains a kind of Benedick to whom reality is still a Dear Lady Disdain; but when will he fall in love?

XV

On some Perversities of Criticism

WE are all critics; and the professional critic is only one who writes and prints where others think or speak. So when we are irritated by him, as we all are, we should remember that his perversities are probably our own, the difference being that he exposes himself in public while we are fools in private. Perhaps the common resentment against him has some envy in it. You, too, would like to see your opinions in print; they seem to you just as good as his and very likely they are just as bad. You may, in fact, learn from him, and from his notorious and persistent errors, how to avoid those errors. If his opinions are wrong, it is worth while to inquire how he has come by them; for you too, have your opinions, and probably have come by them in the same way. Criticism, though it need not be printed, is a necessary activity of the human mind. You experience, or fail to experience, a work of art. If you experience it, something happens to your mind which, in some way, you express to yourself; if you fail to experience it, there is a reason for your failure which also you

express, and probably misrepresent, to yourself. In both cases you criticize; and slowly the reputations of authors and of all kind of artists are made or destroyed by this incessant, half-unconscious, process of criticism. It may be just in the long run—we always assume that it is—but if you assume that it is always just in your own case, that what you fail to experience is not worth experiencing, then you are sure to fall into the worst errors of professional critics, though, since your errors are only spoken or thought, they may not be quoted against you. You will not be put to public shame, like those who reviled Keats and Shelley in print; but your state is no better than theirs, and you too are doing your best to prevent, in yourself and in others, the experience of works of art.

Our first concern with works of art is to experience them; and that is not so easy as most of us suppose. It is not so much that we are born insensible as that we are subject to a number of wrong suggestions which prevent us from experiencing them. These suggestions are everywhere, and especially in the works of professional critics. The danger, in fact, of professional criticism lies less in its actual opinions than in its suggestions, implied rather than expressed; and the best criticism is valuable not so much for its particular judgments as for its attitude. The best critics are those who, having freed their minds from wrong suggestions, are therefore

able to experience works of art, and who, by their manner of writing about works of art, help their readers to experience them.

But, if we are to attain to this freedom and fullness of experience, we must be on our guard against wrong suggestions, must be aware that we are, ourselves, subject to them, and must know that our judgment is worthless until we have learned to experience works of art freely and completely. That, unfortunately, is what many critics, professional or amateur, never learn. Their whole commerce with works of art consists of criticism without experience, criticism which prevents experience; for they are always subject to the wrong suggestion, the commonest of all, that their business with a work of art is to judge it. They are misled, both by the derivation of the word critic, and by their natural desire to judge, since it is pleasant to a nobody to feel that masterpieces are submitted to his judgment, although in fact they are not. For neither does an artist produce a work of art so that it may be judged, nor does the experience of it consist of judgment; and, if you start by judging it, you will certainly fail to experience it.

You must, of course, exercise some judgment upon a book when you begin to read it, because, unfortunately, many books are not worth reading. But in that kind of judgment you are, as it were, a publisher's reader to yourself. You have to decide whether the

book is worth reading, but that is a business operation, made necessary by human folly; it has nothing to do with the experience of works of art or with the criticism of them, but is merely a getting rid of rubbish. And so there are reviewers who perform the useful, if humble, function of readers or tasters to the public. Their business is, or should be, to say that one book is worth reading and another not. So far they are judges, and may be trained by experience to judge swiftly and sometimes surely.

But, having decided that a book is worth reading, you must cease to judge it while you read it; you must let it happen to you, or your opinion of it will not be worth having nor will you make any progress in the experience of literature or of any kind of art. Why, for instance, is it that "art experts" so often make mistakes about the genuineness or authorship of works of art? Why did Herr Bode think that a bust by Lucas was by Lionardo? It is not that the experts are mere charlatans, but that they have fallen, or been forced, into the habit of asking themselves, as soon as they see a work of art, whether it is genuine, or who is the author of it. That is to say, their habit is to pass some kind of judgment upon it; and the habit itself cuts them off from the very experience which alone would enable them to form their judgment. For, if some one shows me a work of art and asks me whether it is a forgery,

I shall look at it with the object of answering that question ; and, if I am constantly asked such questions, I shall get the habit of concentrating my attention upon certain details which I think will help me to answer them. But a clever forger may also concentrate his attention on just the same details and so may be able to deceive me, although, being a forger, he will not have produced a work of art. Forgeries, however plausible in detail, have the dullness of imitations ; but often the expert is not warned of the forgery by its dullness, because he never tries to experience it as a whole. The very fact that from the first he asks himself whether it is a forgery prevents him from seeing that it is one ; and if his whole commerce with art is an attempt to distinguish the genuine from the forged, he remains without the kind of experience that is needed to distinguish real from false works of art.

The literary critic is not often concerned with such questions ; but often he does concern himself merely with judgment, and so never learns how to read a book. For, if you judge as you read, your mind will be on the judgment, not on the book. You read the words and may understand the sentences one by one ; but there is a sense of the whole that you will not grasp, for to do that needs an energy which you have given to your own affair, not to the author's. And though you may enjoy your own process of judgment and the sense of

importance that it gives you, you will, by that very enjoyment, be cut off from experience of the work of art; you will be enjoying yourself and not it. But all right judgment, all good criticism, is based on the enjoyment of works of art themselves and not of any intermediate and obstructive process. Without such enjoyment we lack the knowledge necessary to criticism; we are like judges who have never heard the evidence.

So the first suggestion to be got rid of is the suggestion of judgment; and one might say to critics, as to the human race—"Judge not that ye be not judged"; or, as some one has put it, "We do not judge works of art; they judge us." Learn to experience, to enjoy without judgment; and then your judgments, if they rise naturally out of your experience and your enjoyment, may be worth something.

But there are many other minor perversities and wrong suggestions which prevent the experience of works of art. They are all, I think, connected with the suggestion of judgment, but they deserve particular attention.

There is, first, the *Suggestion of anxiety.* Those who suffer from it are afraid of liking anything they ought not to like; and their first object, in reading a book, is to discover whether or not they ought to like it. So if, while they read, they begin to enjoy it, their enjoyment is at once checked by anxiety. They fear alluring writers as St. Anthony

feared the female demons who tempted him; they must preserve their critical virtue at all costs, and, as St. Anthony knew little of women, so they know little of literature. The saint, since it was his business to be a saint, may have been right; but, when we are concerned with literature and art rather than with saving our souls, it is more important to enjoy than to enjoy the right things; for, if you do not enjoy at all, you will never enjoy the right things.

Those who are subject to the suggestion of anxiety start judging because they think they themselves will be judged by their tastes; they are nervous and, like all nervousness, theirs takes a negative form, so that they fear to enjoy the bad rather than hope to enjoy the good. They are easily intimidated and can often be induced to disclaim a liking for any artist or writer whatever; in bad cases their only pleasure, with regard to works of art, is in rejecting them. But often there remains one artist, to each kind of art, in whom they put their trust; in music, Bach, perhaps; in painting, Cézanne; in literature, Flaubert; and those they employ to depreciate all others. Their taste, they would have us believe, is always *brut*; that is to say, it is a taste for what they know they cannot enjoy.

It may not be true that bullies are always cowards; but it is certain that cowards produce bullies, and there is a whole criticism

of intimidation addressed to æsthetic cowards and admired by them with a slavish fear. As you read the critic whose unconscious aim is to intimidate, you will, unless you are on your guard against his suggestions, begin to experience a feeling of guilt. He seems to judge, not only his unfortunate authors, but you too for liking them. He will throw in a contemptuous remark about some one, such as Swinburne or Meredith, whom, alas, you have admired; and then you feel, if he succeeds with you, that he has found you out as well as them. But you read on, in spite of your discomfort, as you might watch an execution. You must see what other writers he has found out and whether they are writers you have not found out; and you do not ask yourself whether he too may not be suffering from your disease.

In fact, he probably is; in this case the bully is also the coward; for it is what psychologists call an inferiority complex that makes critics so very superior. They, too, are cut off from the experience of art by their fear of enjoying the wrong thing, and behind their mask of complacent irony is the fear that some one might detect them at it. That is what sets them whispering scandal against great reputations; above all things they desire to be thought exquisitely fastidious, with the result that they become as fastidious as a baby that pukes at everything because it cannot digest its food.

Closely connected with the anxiety suggestion is the *Puritanic suggestion*, to which English and Americans are peculiarly subject because they have Puritanism in the blood. They may be desperately on their guard against moral Puritanism, and may even write *vers libres* with coarse words in them to show that they are not Puritans; but, since they are not aware of the causes of Puritanism in themselves, it remains and rankles all the more for being suppressed. As the old Puritans held, consciously, that life is not to be enjoyed, they hold, unconsciously, that art is not to be enjoyed, believing, from their conviction of original sin, that, if they do enjoy anything, it must be bad. And this sense of guilt, whenever they do enjoy anything, at once checks their enjoyment so that they are filled with malice, if ever they see others enjoying any kind of art, and will, if they can, spoil their enjoyment by telling them that it is bad. Hence Little-Bethelism which, in art as in religion, is based on a belief that all are damned except a very few, and so that what most people like must be bad. For the Little Bethelist success is a proof of badness; having convinced himself that some kind of art, whether new or old, is good because it is not enjoyed either by himself or by any one else, he finds a number of people beginning to enjoy it, and at once he persuades himself that he has never liked it. He is like the "Leftist" in politics who cannot share

his opinions except with a handful of other leftists, and for whom any one who gets a majority is therefore a traitor. Just as the old Puritan took a perverse pleasure in shedding theological beliefs and found out that doctrine after doctrine was false, and saint after saint a whited sepulchre, so he sheds artist after artist; and the source of all his perversities is the Puritanic, and Manichæan, suggestion that art is not to be enjoyed in this, æsthetically, wicked world.

Another common and insidious suggestion I will call the *Comparative*. It is the suggestion which comes to some people whenever they are occupied with any artist, that some other artist is better. They can think of one artist only in terms of another, and their comments upon art consist entirely of comparisons. In that they are like the old lady who, watching Sarah Bernhardt in the part of Cleopatra, said, "How unlike the beautiful home-life of our own dear Queen!" So they, while they listen to Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, say to themselves, "How unlike a fugue by Bach!" It is, but the fact is irrelevant; diversity, as it is a virtue of Nature, is also a virtue of art. Bach is Bach; and for that very reason we should not wish other musicians to be like him, just as we do not wish all men to be like George Washington, in spite of his virtues. To ask one artist to be like another is to ask him not to be an artist; and, if you get the habit of com-

parison, you become incapable of enjoying any art whatever. You look before and after and pine for what is not; you concern yourself, not with what an artist is giving you, but with what he is not giving you; and that you demand of him because he is not giving it to you. Criticism subject to this kind of suggestion is common, and wearisome to read. It never attends to the matter in hand, but is always peering round the corner after something that is excellent so long as it is not in sight. But you know its excellence would vanish for the critic if once he had it before him. And that is because he can neither experience nor enjoy any work of art directly; all he can enjoy is the sense that he is engaged in a relentless pursuit of something better.

Then there is the *Tendency suggestion*, the victims of which judge and condemn an artist by what they fear will be his practical effect on other artists, or on his own future. A little more, they say, and this kind of thing will never do. In every work of art they see a future *reductio ad absurdum* of itself. The false suggestion here is that art is a kind of morals or politics full of practical dangers, and that the artist has a duty to do nothing which, if overdone, would be a bad influence. As the free lover may tempt others to love too freely, so a poet who takes artistic liberties may tempt others to be artistic libertines. But art is not propaganda; it does not consist of tendencies, and is not to be judged

in terms of them. If you read poetry, you should be concerned with that poetry and not with the question what would happen if some one else imitated it, or if the poet himself carried his tendencies further. Works of art, unlike conduct or politics, are to be experienced in isolation; and if, by a false analogy, you allow your attention to be diverted from them to their possible consequences, you will not experience them at all.

There is a variety of the Tendency suggestion which I will call the *Movement suggestion.* This causes its victims to ask of every contemporary work of art whether it is in the movement, and to despise it if it is not. There is a common notion now that a movement exists which has made all former art obsolete, except perhaps some Mexican sculpture, a few (lost) paintings of the Tang Dynasty, and a Persian pot or two. This movement is thought of as if it were a mechanical invention, like the safety bicycle which made the old high bicycle obsolete. Certainly it does seem to make art easy; for if you belong to it, you are an artist, while, if you do not, you are a Victorian. It began, in painting, with Cézanne, who was the first to paint apples and napkins incessantly; but it has progressed far beyond him even in the matter of apples and napkins, which those who are in the movement try to paint automatically so as to forget that they are apples and napkins. In poetry it seems to be freed from

the past altogether, expressing itself in *vers libres*. Formal verse, we are told, is dead; and it is possible now to write poetry only in *vers libres*. No evidence is given to support this assertion, except the *vers libres*—which are not convincing.

Here the underlying error seems to be the notion that a kind of mechanical invention is possible in art, which you must adopt if you are not to be, yourself, obsolete. But, unfortunately, art is not like that, and you cannot produce it merely by adopting the devices or discoveries of Picasso; nor are you out of it merely because you ignore those devices. Further, if there is a movement, contemporaries do not know what it is. It may well be that *vers libres*, like the spasmodic poetry of the Victorian age which also was an attempt to make poetry easy, will be remembered, not as a movement, but only as a name; and that there are great poets now alive and writing formal verse whom the victims of the movement suggestion would despise if they had ever heard of them. Critics are always discovering movements in the past of which those who belonged to them were unconscious; and hence the effort to start conscious movements in the present, which have no resemblance to the tendencies, real or imaginary, seen from a distance by the historians of literature and art. These conscious movements may heighten the vitality of those who belong to them; but no

one is an artist because he belongs to them. The greatest artist may be a reactionary in the contemporary politics of art; Shakespeare himself seemed old-fashioned to the admirers of Fletcher; and conscious movements are often only unconscious fashions which to posterity will mean nothing. To identify the movement with excellence is like identifying fashion in dress with beauty; in both cases an irrelevance makes æsthetic experience impossible.

The purpose of this article is to examine some of the suggestions which prevent the experience of works of art and which produce bad criticism. But, if I said no more, I might be taken to imply that criticism can have no principles and should express only the æsthetic adventures of the critic. This I do not mean, though I would rather have æsthetic adventures than principles based on no experience. My point is that principles must be based on experience and that experience is not so easy as we think. The greatest works of art, upon the experience of which principles ought to be based, are complex and highly organized, produced not for the lazy and conceited, but for those who will make an effort answering to the effort of the artist. Those who have experienced them fully know that such experience is rare and difficult, and no less wonderful when it comes. It consists in a sudden sense of the whole, by which all particular beauties are heightened and in

which obscurities and defects vanish. When thus you experience *Hamlet*, it no longer seems to you full of quotations, nor do you ask any questions about it. It proceeds as inevitably as a great tune; and, in fact, all great art, when fully experienced, is like music, meaning nothing outside itself, making a world of its own for us which must be seen or heard to be believed. Without this seeing or hearing there is of course no believing; and it is therefore impossible to convince a critic who has never seen or heard that he is writing about what he does not understand, and that his principles are merely an unconscious expression of that egotism which cuts him off from æsthetic experience. At least, it is vain to argue with him; he is a case for the psychologist who might perhaps reveal to him the causes of that resistance which the greatest works of art set up in him. I have tried, roughly and vaguely, to discover some of those causes; and, if the reader finds himself irritated by my attempt, I would suggest to him that his irritation may be a symptom of resistance to unwelcome truth.

XVI

Simpson's Choice

SIMPSON was rich, and when he came to die,
Thought of the Camel and the Needle's Eye;
And woke beyond the change of death to find
The same cold thought still weighing on his mind.
He woke in darkness with an instant sense
That he was not a man of consequence,
But a bare, helpless soul, that could not tell
Whether the Lord would take him ill or well.
On earth he had been famous for his tact,
Now he was quite uncertain how to act;
Even his knowledge of the world might be
Found worse than useless in Eternity.
Perplexed he stood—then started when he found
That he was standing upon solid ground.
And he was comforted to find that so
The future state was like the world below,
Till he remembered that the event might prove
He rather ought to say—the world above.

In this uncertainty he scanned the gloom
For something to foretell his final doom;

And, as he gazed, it grew less dark, and took
To his surprise an old familiar look ;
Nay more, an old familiar taste and smell
Of sulphurous fumes—yet scarcely fumes of Hell.
Indeed, he snuffed them almost with delight,
That grew, as slowly on his ravished sight
There dawned a scene that made him rub his eyes,
A scene he could not fail to recognize.

It was a thoroughfare both long and wide,
With urban mansions upon either side,
All much alike, and all desirable—
But why describe what Simpson's words will tell ?
Heavens ! he exclaimed, it is my old abode ;
It is, I know it is, the Cromwell Road.
Down on the greasy pavement then he knelt
To utter all the thankfulness he felt ;
But started up, as he became aware
Of a grave, well-groomed stranger standing there ;
And brushed his knees and laughing lightly said—
I very nearly tumbled on my head.

I saw you did—the stranger spoke politely—
I hope you are not injured, even slightly.
The pavement might be cleaner, I confess :
But why it is not so, perhaps you guess ;
And why this fog obscures our azure skies.
But no—you feel the first divine surprise ;

Candidus insuetum—you know the rest.
Simpson did not, but left it unconfessed
Behind a vague and comprehensive smile.
Perhaps this was an angel—but meanwhile
The stranger spoke again. I wish, he said,
To make things pleasant for the newly dead;
Especially when, like yourself, they come
With good credentials from their earthly home.
I know you would not like a sudden change,
And here, I think, is nothing new or strange.
To put it technically—'tis my intent
To reproduce your old environment.
This may surprise you, knowing, as you must,
Old legends of the raptures of the Just.
But you with your past habits, could but find
Eternal raptures little to your mind.
Prophets have tried to paint the glowing scene,
But you and I prefer the golden mean;
And we remember with a tolerant smile
The dreamer of those dreams on Patmos isle.
Each to his taste—the poet and the seer
Would not, I must confess, be happy here;
But where would they be happy? Change your sky,
But you yourself will change not, though you die.
There was a poor musician, called Mozart,
Who made men dream of Heaven with his art;

And now, when you would think he had his will,
He makes God dream of further Heavens still.
A restless fellow! Others too there are,
Who roam infinity, from star to star;
Death brings no peace to them, for they are cursed,
Just like fond mortals, with immortal thirst
For beauty, love and knowledge and what not.
But here such vague abstractions are forgot.
No friend of mine has ever asked for wings,
We rest content with facts and concrete things.

But is there, Simpson cried, no Heaven, or Hell,
And no reward for all that I did well?
No punishment for flagrant vice and crime?
Was my religion all a waste of time?
The stranger smiled—To answer all you ask,
Even for me, is not an easy task.
Perhaps I am too rash; but I reply—
Yes; Heaven and Hell exist, subjectively.
Life was a preparation for the mind;
As it was trained on Earth, so will it find
Heaven here or Hell; and yours, I may surmise,
Is fitted to our temperate Paradise.
You know how, in that troubled earthly life,
Science and Religion often seemed at strife:

Yet men of sense, like you, found each a friend;
For adaptation was their common end.
So now, when they have done their best for you,
Why ask, ungratefully, if they were true?
Falsehood and truth have here made friends and kissed—
I speak as something of a pragmatist—
Their function ended now, their warfare past,
They fuse into Eternal Peace at last;
They are not—you have reached that quiet shore
Where Science and Religion are no more.
Is that not Heaven? If not, I do not know
Where you will find it, seek it high or low.
He paused, and then, ere Simpson could reply,
Suddenly came a voice—You lie, you lie,
Father of lies! How often have you shammed
This fatal friendship for the safely damned.
And yet—perhaps you like them; but for me,
Praise God, you keep a wholesome enmity;
By which, and by my hate of you, I know
That I shall find salvation, sure if slow.
Simpson looked round—amazement struck him dumb.
There, like a dweller in a London slum,
Wild, tattered, filthy, bearing still the trace
Of all his earthly vices on his face,

Stood his own brother James, the ne'er-do-weel,
And greeted him with laughter, peal on peal—
James who had died of drink ten years ago.
Now his first words were! John—I told you so.
Confess; when dying, did I not foretell
That you and I should meet again in Hell?
And now we meet; yet all the while I knew
I could not be so deeply damned as you.
When I did wrong, I knew myself a sinner;
But your worst crimes have never spoilt your dinner.
For each of mine the world has made me smart,
But not so bitterly as my own heart.
You fooled the world, and fooled yourself as well;
Therefore you find yourself at ease in Hell.
Yet we are brothers, and to cheat the Devil,
Our friend here, I'll return you good for evil;
And tell you how your soul may yet be saved,
As I am saving mine.

The stranger waved
The intruder to one side—You see, he said,
I have my enemies among the dead.
But this one you have known too well on earth,
And you can judge what his abuse is worth.
I say no more of that, nor will repeat
The offensive terms he uttered in his heat.

Offensive to us both they are—in fine,
Your reputation stands, or falls, with mine.
If what he chose to say of me is true,
He must have spoken equal truth of you.
Therefore decide—for you alone can tell—
Do you feel——, and does this look like——?
(Sadly the stranger spoke, and his voice sank
To nothing, where the reader sees a blank.)

Simpson began—I must express my pain—
But here his brother James broke in again.
Do you feel damned? Ah, if you did, you might
Enter the darkness that shall lead to light.
Hate him, and hate yourself, and so you may
Learn to love God; there is no other way.
You and men like you—I, myself, as well—
Made life on Earth an imitation Hell.
And here is Hell—enough to move one's mirth—
An imitation of our life on Earth.
Content yourself with that, and you will be
Damned now and into all Eternity.
For my part I rebel. My sins were rank,
You know them all—I loafed, I whored, I drank.
Yet I have never numbed my soul so far
As not to know what good and evil are.
It is not much; but I can recognize
Hell when I see it. You are not so wise;
For you, and others made on the same plan,
This Prince of Darkness is a gentleman.

Have I not seen you happily beguiled
By his dull fictions since you were a child?
'Twas he assured you nothing could be done
To right a single wrong beneath the sun.
From him you learnt how Christians may discount
All statements in the Sermon on the Mount.
'Twas in his weekly organ that you read
The news, put delicately, that God is dead;
And nothing left to worship now on high,
Except the Sacred Rights of Property.
This you believed; and also that you made
Your fortune for the general good of trade.
When men and women starved to fill your maw,
You talked about an Economic Law;
Which, as you heard from some belated priest,
Has taken now the place of God deceased.
Here Simpson checked him. I make no reply,
He said, to mere abuse and blasphemy.
You say that this is Hell—give me your reasons why.

Why is it Hell? I'll tell you, answered James.
Tho' 'tis not red with everlasting flames,
Nor noisy with despairing sinners' wail,
And Satan here has neither horns nor tail;
Yet Hell it is, because the lies which you
Chose to believe on Earth are here come true.
The rich man here can never help the poor,
He sins not when he drives him from his door.

Here, by a law of nature, there must be
Gross riches matched by fetid poverty;
Your riches, if you take them at the price
Satan demands, of your soul's sacrifice,
If you can think this torpor is the rest
Promised by God to spirits of the blest;
And many can—you'll find them here at ease,
Like dogs emancipated from their fleas,
Refusing blandly, with no sense of sin,
All that our souls were meant to seek, and win.
No doubts or fears have they, no wild delights,
No passions now, nothing but appetites,
And these quite tame, and daily satisfied—
Four meals a day, a mansion, and a bride.
If you should want one, Satan will provide.
Yes, you can have your choice, if you would wed,
Of many ladies, perfectly well-bred,
Perfectly barren, both of body and mind,
And severed by their breeding from their kind;
Ladies, not women, purged of brain and heart,
They flaunt across their stage—without a part.

He ceased, distracted by a shuffling sound;
And Simpson started, and flushed red, and frowned;
And then gazed up as if he did not see
A woman who was passing them—but she

Saw him and stopped. Surely, it's John, she said
Come back to me at last, now we are dead.
Don't blush, my dear; I always understood
That you must leave me some day, and be good.
You were a gentleman; but still I knew
You loved me all the same. So tell me true,
Tell me you love me still. Simpson turned green;
The Stranger coughed; it was a painful scene.
You might have heard a pin drop, till James broke
The awkward silence. Gravely then he spoke.
Come, John. You've one more chance to save your soul;
And Mary brings it you, whose heart you stole
While you enjoyed her body. Here's your bride—
Take her and lose with her your worldly pride
And cowardice and coldness. Your old sin
Has found you out and shown you how to win
Salvation. Yes, she looks a tawdry slut,
And Satan here is sleek and solemn—but
She loves you and forgives you. Mary, speak!
Help me to save his soul. But she stood meek
And dumb and frightened; and the stranger spoke—
I fear, he said, this woman has awoke

Some painful recollections in your mind.
But now forget them ; I am deaf and blind
To what has passed. A new life now begins,
And you are cleansed from all your earthly sins.
But, as for you, be off ! Without a word
The woman went ; and Simpson never stirred.

James looked at him and smiled. Satan, rejoice,
He said, my brother John has made his choice.
He's yours ; but we are not, and we know well
That this is Purgatory for us, not Hell.
Yet Hell it is for you, whom Satan's lies
Can flatter to believe it Paradise.
You will not suffer now, for God disdains
To waste on you his purgatorial pains.
He takes no vengeance, as you feared he would
When you on Earth determined to be good ;
But lets you damn yourself. The stranger sighed—
You do not find him altered since he died.
Such natures do not make for happiness
In this life, or the last, as you may guess.
Happiness, shouted James, how dare you use
The word for that which all your damned refuse,
But I desire ? Yes, it is far away,
Ages away from me ; and yet, I say,

I shall attain to it when you are gone,
My Prince of Darkness and my brother John,
Into your native nothingness at last;
And so, Good-bye! He turned, and shuffled fast
Away from them. The stranger sighed again,
And Simpson sighed with sympathetic pain;
Then changed the subject, saying that the day
Gave promise now the fog was cleared away.
Satan agreed, and softly took his arm;
The town, he said, is not without its charm
On these soft misty mornings. We shall meet
Some friends of mine, I hope, along the street,
Whom you might like to know—Here ends my song
Because the rest is very dull and long.

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